THE TIGER & THE INSECT

BY JOHN HABBERTON

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The Tiger and the Insect

WALTER RUSSELL

The Tiger and the Insect

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The Tiger and the Insect

CHAPTER I

A Startling Suggestion

"NELL," said my father one morning, after he had littered his end of the breakfast table with the morning's instalment of letters, "what would you think of a tiger-hunt as a finishing touch to your education?"

Though I was a Western girl—far Northwestern, to be strictly accurate, and had shot some specimens of "big game," merely to show my father and brothers that I was not of the timid type, several knives, forks, and spoons clattered discordantly on plates, cups, and saucers and several pairs of eyes looked inquiringly toward the head of the table. My father continued:

"Your sister Kate seems to be very weary. Harry writes that he is at his wits' end to relieve her still more of the care of the children

He's the best husband I ever heard of,—except one whom modesty forbids me to mention,—but he is so busy looking after his employer's interests that he has not time enough to give to his own. What slaves those Eastern men are! And poor Kate won't intrust the youngsters to a nurse; as they're good as gold, I suppose she fears that some alloy will be sneaked into them. Their father probably feared that I'd ask him to ship the entire lot out to us, for he insists that Kate is too feeble to travel far, and she would go nowhere without her brood. He says that, thanks to their mixed blood, the children are as inquisitive as Yankees and as fearless as Westerners, so they would turn a railway train topsy-turvey and find a dozen ways of killing themselves before they were an hour from home, and if they chanced to survive they would be sure to find an abandoned shaft and fall into it before they'd been here a full day. The Tiger——"

By this time I knew what father meant by a tiger-hunt, for "Tiger" was the oldest nickname of my sister's first-born and my own first niece. How the poor child came by the name doesn't matter, for the origin of family

nicknames is quite as mysterious as any of the philological theories which I was compelled to read in my last year at the high school. We knew there was nothing tigerish in the nature of Kate's darling, for we knew the history of her ancestry on both sides for several generations. We had never seen her, for our little mountain city was two-thirds the distance across the continent from New York, to which city Harry Lintrey had taken Kate a few months after their marriage, with the hope of an early return. But there had not been a month since the Tiger's birth in which we had not received pictures of her, all taken by an amateur's camera, and therefore without any of the trickinesses of "retouching." They had made us well acquainted with a plump, frank, large-eyed countenance, the expressions of which were quite as numerous as the pictures, and all were winning.

After several years the photographs began to include another and a smaller figure, labelled "The Insect," and Kate's letters, which till then had been full of the Tiger and its ways, abounded in what my father termed

"studies in entomology, by a rapturous lunatic." The studies were extremely interesting, but we were as one—my parents, my brothers and I, in our resolve that the Tiger's nose—bless it!—should not be put out of joint in the manner customary in such cases, or, indeed, in any other manner, though the Insect was undoubtedly the dearest, prettiest, cunningest, sweetest second baby that ever came into any family.

"Do Kate and Harry ask for me?" I inquired.

"They would prefer your mother," was the reply, "but they admit——" here father looked significantly at me and my younger brothers, who are the dearest and dreadfullest half-grown boys on the continent,—"but they admit that we have a menagerie of our own, so Harry suggests that your mother's torments might be lessened and Kate might be helped if we were to let you go East for a few weeks. Knowing how reluctant Western girls are to visit New York—Harry is not too weary to enjoy his little joke, I see—he says Kate will provide several new gowns and hats for you to bring back with you, even though most of

them will be made-overs, from old ones of her own."

"And when do they want me?"

"By the first train possible."

"Which won't start till two this afternoon! Six whole hours to wait!"

CHAPTER II.

In the Tiger's Lair

KATE and I had scarcely ceased trying to hug each other's heads off when I became conscious that a penetrating stare was fixed upon me. As I turned my head inquiringly and gazed into the luminous depths of the Tiger's eyes, a voice of great depth and resonance issued from the Tiger's lips.

"You don't look a hingle bit like I hinked you would."

"'Hinked'?" I murmured, as my eyes questioned Kate's.

"She means 'thought'—'thinked'" Kate replied, as she looked at me wonderingly. "Don't you see?"

"Oh, thank you. And the other word? —'hingle'?"

"Why, 'single.' I fear, dear, that your long journey has dulled your wits a bit. I must have some tea made for you at once, for it would never do for you to misunderstand our Tiggie. The dear child is very sensitive."

"'Hensitive!'" echoed the Tiger, turning aside a face which was eloquent with scorn. "Huh!"

"Come to me this instant!—you impertinent, adorable little wretch!" I exclaimed, placing my hands under her shoulders, tossing her up to my lips and kissing her soundly. "Your mother has written me so much about you that I've known you ever since you were born."

The Tiger looked as if she thought my statement was open to doubt and she said, with a note of reproach in her voice:

"I hyood hink, den, dat you'd know what 'hinked' means, wivout havin' to be told."

"But, dear, your mother didn't send me your dictionary."

"Nell Trewsome!" Kate exclaimed; "stop teasing that child!"

"I wouldn't tease her for worlds, you silly mother. But where's your other terror—the Insect?"

"De Insec's takin' her nap," the Tiger replied for her mother. (I soon learned that this was her custom, and that Kate thought it quite motherly of her.) "You mustn't make

no noise till it's time for her to wake up. Your pittcher is on de bed wiv her, to help her fink 'bout you real hard."

"My pitcher?" My eyes filled as I continued: "Kate, dear, I knew that you'd brought some of my old toys to New York with you, to remember me by, but to think that you loved me so much as even to give them to your children as suggestions of me—oh, oh!"

The dear girl made haste to kiss the tears from my eyes and she trembled with emotion, but when my vision became cleared I saw that the emotion was humorous to a degree that threatened hysterics, as Kate said:

"How long railway trips do confuse one's sense of hearing! The Tiger said nothing about a pitcher. She said 'picture.'"

"Yes; pittcher; dat's what I hed. It's one of dem fings of you, all dwessed up, an' 'tandin' by a table, wiv a darden behind you."

"Oh! Do you mean a photograph?"

"Dat's it! Noffin' else looks dat way, does it? Anyhow we've tissed it—de Insec' an' me, till it's awful dirty. Papa finks it ought to doe to de laundry. You tan tum an' hee it, an' hee de Insec' too, if you'll keep weal 'till."

I looked at Kate, who nodded assent, and led the way on tiptoe, as she said :

" The room is dark, so I'm afraid you'll have to strain your eyes to see anything whatever, yet I'm dying to have you see her, for she's the most entrancing little——"

" Oh," said the Tiger, "'taint hoe awful dark in de room, 'tause dere's a takkayite. De Insec' won't doe to hleep wivout it."

" Takkayite ?—takkayite ? " I whispered to myself, as I wondered. Probably it was something new in night-lamps. In the advertising pages of the magazines I had seen descriptions of tiny lamps for people who desired dim light in sick-rooms, but none of them had been called a " takkayite."

Suddenly the word escaped my mind, for in a little crib bed to which Kate led me, after she had drawn the window shade an inch or two, I saw a bewildering and bewitching jumble of ruffled pillow, plump cheeks, yellow hair, long eyelashes, parted lips, gay frock, crumpled fingers, bare knees, tiny toes, dilapidated dolls, some toy animals and a photograph of me. Again the window shade was drawn a bit by Kate, and I saw that the little

knees were rosy and dimpled, and one of them was raised in as close resemblance to a right angle as anything so round and chubby could be. It looked as if made to be eaten ; I know I had to restrain a cannibalistic impulse as I bent over and touched it with my lips, very softly and caressingly, while the Tiger, whose eyes were fixed upon the Insect, whispered warningly,

"Takkayite dettin' too bid ! — Takkayite dettin' too bid ! "

Kate drew me away ; she said afterward that she had suddenly remembered some bites which I had bestowed upon her, my elder sister, years before, on occasions when I had been overcome by sisterly affection, so she trembled for the safety of her baby.

"Kate," I said, "do tell me what takkayites are, and how they are used. Better still, show me one."

"You awful, precious stupid," Kate replied. "Could any one say 'crack o' light' plainer than the Tiger ?" Then Kate looked me over critically, as if to see whether I could have lost all the cleverness which she had always attributed to me. When I was a little child,

her younger and only sister, I was "brought up" by her quite as much as by our mother, and consequently, in those old days, I was to her a sentient and glorified doll-baby and an indication of what her own children would be, when she had acquired them. Her eyes became so searching that I had to be either defiant or affectionate; of course I chose the latter, for Kate was the best sister that ever lived, so I threw my arms about her and said:

"'Takkayite' — 'crack o' light' — Why, they're as like as two peas! But 'tis so long since I've heard any baby-talk,—not since you and I had a full vocabulary of it, though we were old enough to have dropped it years before."

"Old enough, indeed!" Kate exclaimed, her face losing a dozen years while she spoke. "I've been talking the delightful old nonsense over again ever since—oh, ever since the Tiger was an hour old."

"And your husband hasn't begun divorce proceedings?"

"The idea! Harry's as much of a baby as I, when he's talking with the children."

"How strange!" I murmured, as my mind went backward a few years in search of Harry

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Lintrey as he was when first I saw him—a young man not long out of college. He had gone west with the intention of overcoming the country and winning a fortune, but he had been overcome by malaria and afterward he won Kate while he was trying to recover his health in our life-giving mountain air. I knew him to be all that was good, for Kate said he was, but to me he had always seemed a mass—a mountain—of dignified self-importance, and his speech was as painfully, exasperatingly exact as that of any newly-fledged teacher from whom I had suffered at school. The thought of such a being dropping into baby-talk was so amusing that I indulged in a fit of laughter. Kate seemed surprised, and as I feared that she would read my thoughts and become indignant I made haste to explain by saying:

"A large Indian reservation school not far from us is going to make an entire change of teachers. What a pity that Harry and you can't accept the responsibility! The little redskins talk very like the Tiger, so if you and Harry indulge in the same jargon——"

Kate stopped me with an outburst of her physical self that reminded me of old times, when we were rural romps together.

CHAPTER III

A New Acquaintance

"WHY didn't you telegraph us that you were coming?" Harry asked, as we rose from dinner (which I, in Western fashion, persisted in calling "supper"). "If I'd known you were coming to-day I wouldn't for anything have invited an acquaintance to drop in this evening."

"Oh, Harry," moaned Kate. "Who is he?"

"No one dreadful," was the reply, "but, on the contrary, a good fellow, whom I think Nell will like. In fact, 'tis only Wayne Stryver, brother of your friend, Mrs. Lyle. Besides, he is to come into our office as a general assistant, and afterward to go West or South where some of our mining interests may need a man from the office, so I want to make much of him, aside from the fact that he's a graduate of my own Alma Mater and a member of the Greek-letter society of which I was a bright and shining light. He's at least half a dozen

years my junior, but he's a manly, hearty chap, and a gentleman, too."

"He's always welcome here," said Kate, "but you must do all the entertaining this evening, for Nell and I have still oceans of things to talk about before we can think of sleeping."

"It shall be as you wish, my dear, but you'll at least let me introduce him to Nell. A single glance at such a young woman should be worth an hour of ordinary society."

"Spare Nell's blushes!" said Kate, at the same time looking at me so admiringly that I stole a glance at myself in the sideboard mirror. Naturally I was not sorry that my cheeks had not lost any mountainside color with which they had started from home, that my eyes were bright, and my hair, despite some unconventional rearrangement by the Tiger and the Insect, was not unbecoming.

Kate and I passed to the children's room—a mere little closet of one of the chopped-up floors which New Yorkers call "flats," and in which most New York people live, and soon we were gazing, with many exchanges of idiotic smiles, at the Tiger and the Insect, who

were putting their dolls to bed for the night, and doing it as seriously and lovingly as if the masses of plaster and wax and rags were children like themselves. Suddenly the servant brought in a card, from which Kate read:

"Mr. Wayne Stryver."

We went to the parlor, and I saw what I expected to see, and I wondered why college men of a certain type should be as alike as grapes on a cluster. Mr. Stryver had a large, important face, and a large, important voice, and a large, important manner. I had seen half-a-dozen of his kind out West, where they had come to enter business, and I had mistaken the earlier arrivals for ministers until I learned that it was only while making calls that they wore coats as long and black as any of the reverend clergy, though not buttoned quite so high at the throat. Most men spoke well of them; even my father said they might make fine men of themselves, if their sense of importance could be first dynamited out of them, or otherwise disposed of.

Still, Mr. Stryver was the guest of my sister and her husband. After he had said the proper commonplaces to Kate, and said them

in a manner befitting a final and conclusive opinion as to the fate of nations and the universe itself, he did me the honor to restrict his conversation almost entirely to me. He talked of the weather, and of railway travel, and of some Western places he had seen, and all the while his voice and manner reminded me of all other young college men from the East—"college gate-posts," we girls had called them. He also reminded me of the audible exercises of the male section of the rhetoric class of our high-school at home, in which the older "boys" were really young men and the instructor was a young man not long out of college. Were it not enraging, it would have been amusing, because so utterly unlike anything which my elder brother, himself a college graduate, had dared to attempt at home. And my sister's husband once talked in the same way, though I had already learned that now he talked like sane human beings.

A few moments later Mr. Stryver tried honestly but failed lamentably to unbend, by talking of golf, in which I delight, but which he treated as solemnly as if it were a part of the straight and narrow way that leads to eternal

life. Suddenly there came through the hallway an unharmonious soprano-contralto wail. Kate flew, and I, glad of an excuse to escape from golf treated seriously, excused myself and dashed after her.

"Don't cry, mamma's darlings," Kate was saying as I entered the nursery.

"But I wants to kwy!" replied the Tiger, whose cheeks were channelled with tears, "'tause I hurted de Insec'."

"Hurted me on de nose!" wailed the Insect, whose ridiculous apology for a nose was very red.

"But Tig didn't mean to hurt you, darling."

"But I dess I did," sobbed the Tiger, while a new flood of tears welled forth. "Anyhow, I wanted to hee how de Insec' would look if hyee hadn't any nose at all, hoe I banged my head right down on her dee little hmeller."

"Tiger! Do you think that was kind?"

"No, I don't. Dat's why I'm kwyin'. Don't you unnertan'?"

"I fordivved her," said the Insect plaintively; then she too turned on the tap of tears at full force as she continued, "but s'e s'apped me an' said s'e wouldn't be fordivved."

I turned my face to laugh unseen, but suddenly time turned backward many years and similar scenes between Kate and me came hurrying out of my memory ; a second later and I was pressing my eyes with my handkerchief. Of course, this was utterly silly. Kate, supposing I was laughing at her darlings, grasped my shoulders and turned me with a force that did credit to her mountain-nursed blood and nerve, but when she saw my eyes she embraced me, while the Insect tumbled from the bed and the Tiger sprang at me, her face changing entirely while she said :

"Tum on, Ince ! Let's tumfo't dee poo' auntie ! Hyee's dot twubbles, too. Heems to me ev'rybody's dot 'em."

In an instant those dears were simply swarming on me, for although they were but two they climbed upon me and about me so rapidly, as I sank into a low easy chair, and their caressing little hands and warm puff-balls of lips were so omnipresent that it seemed as though a score of children were upon me. And they were mine !—my nieces at least. A new sense of ownership came over me, and I put my arms closely about my new-found treasures, and the Tiger said :

In an instant those dears were simply swarming on me.

"Auntie's laughin' an kwyin' bofe at a time! Ince, let's tiss her eyes dwy." In an instant their angelic lips were all over my eyes and I began to deluge the children with a lot of endearing names which came to me suddenly from I don't know where, and they responded in kind, until the Tiger threw back her head, looked adoringly into my eyes, and exclaimed:

"You's just like mamma. Humtimes hyee does dat hame way—laughs an' kwyes at de hame time. Only hyee's happy bofe ways."

"Mamma's a dee fing," added the Insect, while Kate leaned over me and said:

"Nell, do control yourself. Your face will be a sight when we return to the parlor, and Mr. Stryver——"

"Oh, shoot Mr. Stryver!" I exclaimed. "And Nell, your children could talk as plainly as any others if you'd give them a little attention. The Tiger pronounces her "s" and "r" distinctly when they are in the body of a word, so of course she could do so at the beginning. I'm going to make it my duty to teach her to speak properly."

"If you do," replied Kate, with a savage gesture, "or if you even attempt it, I—why, I

really believe I'll murder you." Then she gently bathed my eyes and cheeks with cold water, and disentangled the children from me, and put them into bed and cooed like a mother-bird who has two or three nurseries a year in the wistaria-vine over my window at home. Then she led me to my own room, and, looking from behind me into the mirror, whispered:

"Nell, you're positively radiant. Mr. Stryver will——"

"Kate," I exclaimed indignantly, "if you mention that college gate-post again I shall——"

"Sh—h—h,"—and Kate placed a hand on my lips. "Walls have ears, in these little bits of apartments."

"'Him that hath ears to hear, let him hear,'" I retorted rudely, for the thought of exchanging the presence of my cherubic nieces, even though they were dropping asleep, for that of a solemn young man to whom I would be obliged to be pleasant was enraging. Kate pressed me toward the parlor; evidently our approach was unheard, for as we reached the door Harry was listening to and laughing at a story which Mr. Stryver was telling gleefully

and illustrating with gestures as devoid of dignity as any boy's could have been. Kate stopped abruptly; she said afterward that she had no patience with a woman who would interrupt a story in which her husband was interested; so Mr. Stryver continued his recital and illustration quite as vivaciously and naturally as if he were one of my rough-and-tumble younger brothers at home. So I became interested in the story itself, but suddenly Kate—oh, why will people select the wrong time for the unavoidable!—Kate was compelled to cough. Instantly Mr. Stryver became once more a college gate-post and remained so until we were seated.

CHAPTER IV

Playing Mamma

I WAS not slow in learning that Harry had been quite within bounds in writing my father that "Kate was very tired." Indeed, how she remained alive was at first a mystery to me. The woman had been living only for her children—and her husband, of course, for she worshipped him with an intensity which startled me at times. But there was a difference; in some mysterious way she became stronger hour by hour while Harry was at home, and not only because he was unwearying in trying to relieve her of care. She gave forth all that she had gained, however, and more beside, in her long day with the children. To me she was tender and loving as ever, and she wanted to know anew of all the home life that she had left when she married; but often, when I was responding to her demands, I could see she was not listening to me. I would be turning my heart inside out to her, as a girl can do only to a loving sister, but at times it was plain that

she was not interested in what was most interesting to me, and her head was generally posed like that of our family's favorite guide when we went hunting in the wild country up the valley—a pose that suggested alert and endless listening for something that was not impending yet might occur.

Soon I learned the meaning of it; it meant that the children might "do something." What this something might be I never could imagine, for the children were disembodied saints compared with any other little girls I had known. They amused themselves by the hour, and Harry had encouraged their mother to leave them undisturbed at their play. They never quarrelled with Norah, Kate's dainty little maid of all work, who was devoted to them; they never even elicited a scream or a scratch from Snoozer, the family cat, though they handled that dignified animal frequently and freely. But Kate explained that they had inherited investigating tendencies from their father; his professional duties compelled him to pry into many of the secrets of the universe, and as he longed to know the why and wherefore of everything, so did they.

"Their imagination takes entire control of them at times," said Kate. "They never do anything bad, but—oh, such dreadful things!"

Every day, when the weather was not bad, Kate and I took them into a park in front of the house for an airing and for exercise, though their evening romps with their father would have been sufficient exercise for any ordinary children. This park was proportioned like a shoestring, with much length and very little breadth. It was also, like a tiny Asiatic kingdom described in one of Kipling's stories, "principally on edge," but its rockiness was delightful to Kate and me as a reminder of home. Here we would turn the children loose while we chatted of old times, but never would Kate lose her alert, apprehensive manner. It was of no use for me to explain that if the children bruised their precious fingers on out-cropping rocks, or scratched their angelic faces while trying to follow a bird into a thicket, or rolled down a grassy slope to be stopped thumpingly by a rocky pathway, they were merely following the early Western example of their mother and aunt, and would laugh at their little mishaps as we had done.

Kate admitted frankly that we had never been any the worse for our outdoor pranks, but she explained that her own children—well, not exactly that they were of better clay than their mother, but they were, oh, so different. It was plain that if the dear girl was to get any rest and relief through me I would have to pretend to be of her way of thinking. Of course it would be rank hypocrisy, but what will not a whole-hearted girl do for her only married sister ?

I succeeded so well that within three days Kate intrusted the children entirely to me while she took late morning naps, and I had been with her but a scant week when Harry took her to the Catskills for a few days of entire rest. But her going was the result of a conspiracy. Harry came home at noon one day to say that he must take a vacation then or never, and that he would not go without his wife ; meanwhile I had planned to pack Kate's trunk quickly, having learned where and what was everything that should go into it. When Kate hung back affrighted, on account of the children, I assumed an offended air, and glibly rattled off every detail of their

daily needs, from waking till bed-time, until the dear girl smiled approvingly and closed her eyes blissfully, as if she might really trust herself to take the rest she needed.

"Besides," said she, as if talking to herself, "Norah knows just when and how to prepare their food, and our doctor lives but two minutes away, and Norah would not be afraid to go for him at night. But——"

"But what?—you dear old fuss?"

"But there's the putting of them to bed."

"Which you know they've let me attend to, two entire times. A sister that doesn't appreciate what a sister can do, and is delighted to do for her, doesn't deserve a sister."

Kate threw her arms about me and murmured:

"The dear little things have learned to adore you, but——"

"But what?—you self-destroying idiot?"

"But I've never been away from them—not since the Tiger was born." And Kate burst into tears.

"Then 'tis time you began to make a change. Who cared for the Tiger when the Insect floated down from heaven?"

"Harry did. But——"

"But Harry," said the owner of the name, "doesn't seem to be thought worthy of even a vacation, unless he goes alone, which he won't—not if he must even die for lack of it." Kate showed signs of weakening, so Harry continued. "Even now he's going to lose a full day of it, unless he starts at once. The carriage is at the door and the trunks can follow by express."

Kate looked at the children as if wondering whether she really could bring herself to part with them. She covered them with convulsive kisses which elicited small response, for the children were preparing their dolls for the afternoon nap which these mock-infants were supposed to take.

Harry hurried her downstairs, whispering, "Don't dare to say good-by to them," and I hung out of the window, wishing my sister blessings innumerable and getting frantic hand-waves in return.

When the carriage had disappeared from view I instinctively turned my face westward—homeward, and encountered a breeze as dust-less and invigorating as if it had come direct

from my native hills—as I didn't doubt it had, so I asked some questions of it; one can safely ask information of an honest breeze, and it whispered in my ear, or I imagined it did, and I began to be homesick, for the first time since my arrival. Suddenly the breeze rallied me by threatening to unloose my hair and carry it away, so I withdrew my head, the motion being hastened by a suspicion that the cat Snoozer had been trying for a moment or two to climb my skirt. As I passed a hand downward to dislodge the animal I encountered a warm little hand, and I saw the Tiger's eyes dancing against a mass of golden hair all a-blow, and I heard the Tiger say:

"Your head looks like de wind been playin' hide-an'-doe-heek in it."

"So does yours, you precious sprite. How did it come so?"

"Oh, I hunged out de window, too."

"You dreadful child! You might have fallen and been killed."

"Oh, I dess not. I had tight hold of your tloses. But de dolls has all dawn to hleep. Tum hee 'em."

I went into the nursery, and saw, lying on a

toy bed, a lot of dolls of all ages and conditions of doll-life. The Tiger bestowed a motherly touch upon two or three of them, and said:

"When dey's dawn to bed it's time for de Insec' to take her nap, but I tant find mamma to fix her. I wonder where hyee's dawn to?"

As she spoke she looked so searchingly into my eyes that I trembled, for I remembered that nothing had been said to the children about the length of Kate's absence. It seemed necessary to explain quickly, so I said:

"Mamma had to make a little trip to the country in a great hurry, and she was sure that you and Ince would be willing that auntie should take care of you until her return. And won't we have fun?—I playing mamma, and you and Ince making believe that you belong to me?"

The Tiger looked doubtful, so I took her in my arms and kissed her and caressed her and tickled her, and soon we were enjoying a hilarious gale of our own making. But we were interrupted by a plaintive wail of:

"Mam—ma."

"Tum along! I'll tell her 'bout it," said

the Tiger, tugging me toward the nursery, where, in a motherly manner which was an amusing and touching imitation of Nell's own, she said, "Dee little Insec', mamma's dawn out, an' hyee's doin' to let us play dat Aunt Nell is mamma. Won't dat be fun?"

"No, 'twon't. I wants my mamma."

"Be a dood dirl, Insec'," said the Tiger, in wonderful imitation of her mother's tone and manner, "an' we'll hee how nice Auntie Nell tan mate-b'lieve mamma."

"Don't want no ol' mate-believe mamma! Wants my real, only, very mamma," the Insect wailed, before burying her face in her pillow, and kicking the air and twitching her shoulders and back in a manner that reminded me of one of our colts at home in his first protest against bridle and saddle. I leaned over her, and I know that all the tenderness that is in my nature was in my voice, as I said:

"My dear little Ince——"

"I ain't your dee'. I'se mamma's."

I took one of her hands in both of mine and kissed it gently several times—quickly, but the Insect turned on the bed as suddenly as if she had received an electric shock, and her

" Dee little Insec', mamma's dawn out."

other hand gave me a slap that was amazingly great in proportion to the size of the child. I sprang up—hurt, indignant and humiliated in body and mind.

"De real mamma never looks dat way," said the Tiger, whose eyes had been fastened upon me disapprovingly.

"Indeed? And does the real mamma ever receive such treatment from the Insect?—the little beast? And if she does——" here I raised my hand, opened to its full capacity, ——"how hard a spanking does the Insect receive?"

The child looked horrified; then her face grew pale and her plump lips became a bloodless line as she replied:

"If you dare to 'pank de Insec'"—here she extended her hand toward a match-safe—"I'll light a match at you an' het you all afire."

Though I had been trained to be afraid of no one but my parents, I retreated to a corner and hid my face in my hands.

"Are you 'fraid,—hones' an' truly, or only make-b'lieve 'fraid?" the Tiger asked.

"Neither, Tig," I replied. "I'm merely heart-broken."

"Doodness dracious!" the Tiger exclaimed. "Dat's jus' what mamma hed de time papa had to be away from home for free whole days. I dess we'se dot to do for you what we done for mamma dat time. Tum on, Ince—twick! Let's play papa."

How they managed it I can't imagine, but in a moment they had pushed me upon the bed and were caressing me and purring a great assortment of endearing names, which they had probably learned from their father. It was all so unexpected that I remained entirely quiet for several moments; and I wondered whether Kate and I in our juvenile days had been such strange compounds of savagery and sweetness. But I did not forget my original purpose, which was to "play mamma" to the Insect. I stole an arm about her and succeeded in pillowing her head on my other arm, and in cuddling her face up to my throat, into which she began to breathe softly and regularly. A motion of her free arm put me on guard for an instant, but a little hand stole softly over my cheek, and slowly the little thumb and fingers crumpled themselves on the lobe of my ear.

The Tiger had become silent, but I knew that she was leaning over me. Soon she whispered softly:

"I dess hyee's all wight now. Hyee never 'tarts to take her nap without feeling mamma's ear. I dess you tan det up now."

But I did not wish to get up. My short life seemed very long as I looked backward at the many pets I had owned—dolls, kittens, rabbits, birds, dogs, squirrels and other creatures from which I had been almost inseparable, while they lived, but all of them combined were not so warm and cunning and tender and sweet and precious and—oh, everything, as the atom of humanity that was breathing warmly into my neck and all the way down to my heart.

CHAPTER V

At the End of a Wire

I WAS roused from the longest, most delicious day-dream I had ever known by the Insect turning in her sleep and rolling to the other side of the bed. Then I saw the Tiger kneeling in a chair and looking down at both of us.

"You poor dear," I said, after we had left the room. "Your Auntie Nell was a brute to lie there enjoying herself and leaving you alone."

"Oh, I wasn't alone," was the reply, "for I had lots of lovely finks for tump'ny, for I was playin' mamma too, an' making b'lieve dat bofe of you was my best dollies."

I chanced to see the reflection of my rather broad shoulders in the mirror, so I said, with a laugh and a yawn.

"I'm afraid you found me a rather large doll."

"I didn't, at all. Anyfin's easy, when you's jus' makin' b'lieve, if you let de make-b'lieve

have its own way. Dat's what papa hays, when he an mamma makes b'lieve dey's dot a house all of deir own. So dey have de house wiv lots of rooms an' a bid flower-darden all over de roof. Humtimes——"

The doorbell clanged violently and Norah brought in a despatch addressed to me. Visions of everything dreadful that might have happened at home—and home was so far away—came to me and made my hands a-tremble as I tore the envelope. My brothers were as venturesome as boys in general; my father often went into mines which he knew were dangerous, and he liked to ride spirited horses, and my mother liked to ride with him, so anything might have happened. The despatch was dated from the New York side of a railway company's ferry and read as follows:—

"Don't give the children sweets with their supper."

KATE.

"I wish I could get hold of your mother;" I exclaimed so savagely that the Tiger glared at me suspiciously and demanded, in the deepest notes of her very deep voice,

"What would you do to her?"

"I'd—I'd—I'd hug her head off."

"Oh, dat's noffin'," the Tiger replied, as she became her lamb-like self again. "I wants to do dat all de whole time. Ain't hyee dee'?"

"Indeed she is."

"Tell you what let's do. Let's play bidder an' bidder."

I had never heard of the game, so I said:

"What do we play it with?"

"Why, wiv our moufs, of tourse. De Insec' an' me plays it lots of times. First, you tell humfin' weal nice dat mamma is, an' den I'll tell humfin' nicer an' bidder, an' den——"

"Oh—'bigger and bigger'?"

"Yes; dats what I hed;—bidder and bidder."

"Let me see;—she's the dearest sister in the world——"

"An' de best mamma——"

"And the sweetest woman——"

"Hweeter dan tandy——"

Again the bell clanged, and Norah brought me another despatch. This, surely, must be from home. What could have happened? I opened it and read:

"Nor sweets at bedtime either." KATE.

I laughed as I crumpled the paper, and the Tiger said:

"I dess you dot a funny letter."

"Indeed I did, and from a precious lunatic, too."

"Dat's funny," and the Tiger looked reminiscent. "Dat's what papa humtimes calls mamma."

"Your papa is evidently a very sensible man, Tig."

"Dat's what he is. Why, mamma hays dat if people knowed how hmart papa is dey'd make him Pres'dent of de 'Nited 'Tates. But hyee's made him promise dat he won't ever let 'em, 'tause folks hays mean fings 'bout pres'dents, an' if dey ever hed bad fings 'bout papa hyee'd want to murder 'em, an' 'tain't wight to want to murder people, an' papa hays it ain't ladylike, neiver. Do you fink it's ladylike fo' Hnoozer to kill birdies in de park?"

"I—I can't say that I do, though I don't see the application, for Snoozer is only a cat."

"But hyee's a lady tat; hyee had a whole lot of little children one time. An' de Insec' an' me loved 'em hoe hard dat dey died. Papa hed dey'd be a lot happier dat way, an' dat

too much 'fection ain't dood for tats an' tittens, an 'dat's why Hnoozer yowls, an' digs her tlawses into our pawses when we hugs her hard. Has you dot a tat at your house?"

"Yes, dear; a wild-cat—but tis stuffed. We prefer them that way."

"How funny! Humtimes we 'tuff Hnoozer, but it divs her a tummat-ate."

"A despatch, miss," said Norah, entering with the familiar yellow envelope, which I could now open without fear. I read:

"Don't forget that the Tiger is very sensitive."

KATE.

"Heems to me you dets lots of letters," said the Tiger. "Is dey all from your hweetheart?"

"N——yes, dear; from the sweetest kind of a sweetheart."

"Dat's dood, 'tause I heard mamma tell papa dat hyee wished hyee knew if you had one, an' hyee hoped you had, 'tause 'twas all you needed to make you perfect. But hyee hed de hweetheart would have to be as hweet as papa, or it wouldn't do. Is it?"

"Yes, dear"——though I suspect I frowned

at Kate's reported opinion as to my chief need, for the Tiger said:

"Den I don't see why you're makin' such an awful face 'bout it. An' I wish de Insec' would wake up."

"Tig, dear, let the precious little sister rest while she will."

"Oh, I wouldn't wake her for anyfin', but I do want to hear the 'tory."

"Tory?—tory?—oh!—story. What kind of story do you expect, and from whom?"

"From de Insec', of tourse, but I don't know what tynd it'll be. De Insec' always brings one, an' humtimes two or free, back from Napland wiv her. You know what a djeam is, don't you?"

"Oh, yes; every one does."

"Oh, no, dey don't. De Insec' don't; mamma hays hyee's too young to have 'em 'plained to her. Whenever hyee djeams anyfin', hyee finks it happened, an' it's lots of fun to hear her tell 'bout it, when de djeams is dood to de Insec'. One time mamma was awful sad 'tause humbody hed hyee ought to 'plain to me 'bout Hanta Tlaus, but—dood-ness, I didn't have to be told, for I dessed it."

"Guessed what—and how?"

"Dessed dere wasn't any man named Hanta Tlaus! 'Tause no sleigh could doe across houses an' back yards, an' no man tould climb down our chimney, 'tause it's hoe hmall dat my head won't doe up it. Hoe I asked papa, an' he looked sad-like, an' I asked mamma, an' hyee wouldn't talk 'bout it an' tell who really brought de Trismas presents. An' I finked a whole lot 'bout it, an' one day I finked all-a-hudden, 'No man knows what I want for Trismas presents 'cept papa, hoe Hanta Tlaus is jus' my papa, makin' b'lieve, an' of tourse papa's nicer dan any old waindeer man.' Hoe I've never felt bad 'bout it afterwards."

"Miaouw!—Miaouw!—Miaouw!" came a kittenish sound from the direction of the nursery. The Tiger clapped her hands and exclaimed:

"De Insec's awake, an' I'll bet hyee's djeamed 'bout tats! You must make believe a whole lot now, for——"

"A despatch, miss," said Norah. Apparently Kate was dropping them from stations along the railway. This newest one read:

"Try to bear in mind that the children are very imaginative. Don't try to change them." KATE.

"Miaouw !—Miaouw !—Miaouw !" sounded nearer, and the Insect trotted into the room, bringing with her a face like a rose in the first rays of the sun.

"What do you fink I haw?" she asked, stopping in front of us and laughing merrily.

"Tell us all about it," exclaimed the Tiger, as she gave my arm a warning pinch.

"Oh, I haw a whole lot of tats hittin' up like folks, in chairs 'round a dinin'-room table, an' havin' a tea-party. Dey had tea-cups of warm milk, an' plates of mouse-sandwiches."

I shuddered; the Tiger pinched my arm warningly till I wanted to scream, but I forced a smile and said:

"Go on, dear. Mou—ou—ou—ouse sandwiches?"

"Yes, an' de mouses had dee little tayals. An' de tats all had tayals too, an' de tayals kep' fwinging wound de chairs, as if dey was hayin', 'Ain't I dlad I tame to dis tea-party?' An' after dey dot up from de table dey had a dance, an' after de dance de djentlemen-tats bwought de lady tats lemonade, an' tea, an'

toffee, an' take, an' dey was jus' doein' to put on deir fings an' have a nice long talk in de hall before doein' away, an'—an' den I didn't hee noffin'. An' I'd like to know why I didn't?"

The question was addressed to me, but the Tiger answered:

"P'raps dey's doein' to let you hee 'em again to-morrow, dear."

"Despatch, miss," said Norah again. It read as follows:

"Don't ever give them paregoric. Soothing personal influence always answers the purpose."

KATE.

Paregoric, indeed! The little dears were welcome to lie awake as long and as late as I. I had just begun to wonder what I could do to interest them, when one of Kate's acquaintances called, and was quickly followed by another, and I learned from them that it was Kate's customary day "at home." I did my best, as temporary lady of the house, and they were glad to learn that my sister was to have some rest and a change, and as one of them was a middle-aged lady with no children, and therefore knew everything about the care and

training of little girls, I was compelled to listen to a ten-minute lecture on juvenile dress, diet, taste, and temper, with some digressions on kindergarten fads. The lecture might have been longer had there not bounded into the parlor a small creature in red coat, trousers, shoes, gloves, and cap.

"Bless me," exclaimed the middle-aged lady, dropping her glasses and her subject, and standing in her chair. "I didn't know that Mrs. Lintrey kept a monkey."

The animal stopped, looked at both visitors, came over toward me, raised its head, displaying the face of the cat Snoozer, and uttering an appealing:

"Miaouw!"

A sound like the tramping of horses was wafted in from the hall and after it came the Tiger and the Insect. Snoozer heard them and prepared to spring, though apparently uncertain of her covered paws. When she saw the children she sneaked under the divan, where she was quickly followed by my nieces, who crawled so far that nothing of them was visible but shoe-soles. Probably a struggle ensued, for we heard an emphatic "S—s—

s—spt" and a howl and a wail, and some bumping of heads against the floor. Then Snoozer reappeared with her cap awry, and fire in her eye, and a button or two of her jacket loose, and one of her shoes off, though dragging. The children's knowledge of the ways of cats had prompted them to draw the portieres close, in default of a door, when they entered, and the cat had believed her customary way of escape barred, for she sprang into the middle-aged lady's chair and hid behind the scarcely visible feet, which feet, with all that was superincumbent upon them, quickly sought the floor and hurried away, with scant leave-taking. As she escaped, followed by Snoozer, she collided with Norah, who entered and said:

"A despatch, miss."

"Pardon me?" I said to the remaining caller, a young married woman, who seemed greatly amused by what she had seen, and who endeavored to console the children. The despatch read:

"Don't at any time fear that the children will do anything they shouldn't." KATE.

I crumpled the despatch and tried to think

only of my duty as Kate's substitute, but I fear that the Snoozer incident remained fresh in my mind and I know that Kate's latest despatch was lamentably ill-timed. The caller looked at me with eyes full of laughter and said :

"You look like a tragedy queen, my dear, and I wish you wouldn't. I think 'twas real funny. I've children of my own, and they're very like your nieces."

She said it so sweetly, yet with a voice in which each word seemed a bubble of fun, that despite my indignation I laughed, which relieved her of the last vestige of restraint, so we laughed together and called the children all the good and bad names we could think of. Then we demanded an explanation.

"Why, you hee," said the Tiger, "we 'membered dat you hadn't heen de Hnoozer in de closes papa made for her one day when mamma was hick an' he made b'lieve he was an organ-drinder wiv a monkey. Hoe we dressed Hnoozer up, 'n'——"

"An' Hnoozer bee'd a hateful ol' fing," wailed the Insect.

"Let me help you receive, and to care for

the children, my dear," said the caller. "I've some little ones of the same kind, and I assure you that there is no knowing where and how they will break out next."

"You're very kind," I replied, "and I shall be glad to have you remain, although"—— and I picked open the small yellow ball of paper in my hand and asked her to read Kate's latest, at which she laughed heartily. Between callers I learned that she was sister of Mr. Wayne Stryver, whom she declared the dearest brother in the world, of whom she had never seen enough since he had gone into a profession. How so dry a stick could have so natural and merry a sister passed my comprehension, though I did not say so. But I warned the children to do nothing whatever that could give them an excuse to enter the parlor again.

Callers came and went and I learned that Kate knew a lot of women who, like herself, were young mothers, and to whom my assistant insisted on telling the story of Snoozer and the children and the childless middle-aged lady. Their charming manners kept me from feeling uncomfortable as hostess, and

when Mr. Stryver's sister took her leave she kissed me and said :

"You dear girl, you play lady of the house as gracefully as your sister, which is the highest praise that could be given any one."

The door had scarcely closed on her when Tiger dashed at me and exclaimed :

"We fought hyee'd never doe ! It's hupper-time, an' we're most 'tarved. De Insec's up in her high-chair, an' eatin' air by de 'poonful. I'm 'fraid hyee'll make a balloon of herself if you don't hurry."

"You poor starved dears, couldn't Norah give you something to eat ?"

"Of tourse, but mamma hays we mustn't never forget to be little ladies, an' dat when dere's tump'ny to meals we mustn't begin till de tump'ny tums to de table."

The "tump'ny" hastened to the evening meal. As this was supper to the children, dinner to me, I felt that I was tormenting and cruel as I partook of dishes which the children were supposed to crave yet which were denied to them. But the dear little things were as cheerful, and as satisfied with their plainer food, as if they cared only for what was "good

for them "—how I hated that expression when I was a child! I feared for the result when the dessert should appear, but as only fruit was brought in I could indulge the little dears to their heart's content.

We went from the table to the parlor, where I placed the children on the sill of the open window, as was Kate's custom, but I also imitated Kate by putting an arm around each, and clutching with each hand a fold of juvenile raiment. We looked out on the park, across which many business men and women were hurrying to their homes, and into which many young couples were sauntering, to chat in the approaching twilight and moonlight, and I became lost in wonder at the many varieties of people that make up the population of a great city, for out home we had but two classes. The children were chattering, but I did not hear what they said, until the Tiger tugged me to attention and asked:

"Isn't it, Auntie Nell?"

"Isn't what, dear?"

"Why, I've asked you free times now—isn't it lovely?—all dat twitterin'—don't you hear it over in de trees?—isn't it lovely to hear de

mamma birdies puttin' de birdie babies to bed? Only I don't fink it's nice for de baby birdies to hleep in de closes dey's worn all day."

"One time I was a baby birdie," said the Insect, "an' lived in a tree, an' dressed all over in fevvers. An' mamma bwought 'trawberries an' tandies an' dwopped 'em wight into my mouf. An' s'e 'tretched out her wingses to teep hun'hine out of my eyses."

"Oh, Ince!" I exclaimed. The Tiger pulled my face down to her own and whispered:

"Hyee djeamed it—don't you hee? Doe on, Incie dear. What else did mamma do?"

"Oh, hyee hung a hong, 'bout Wock-a-bye, baby, on de chee-top."

"What did mamma do to Tiggie?" asked the Tiger.

"Didn't do noffin'. You was at anuvver nest, puttin' a dolly to bed. An' I wocked an' wocked an' wocked an' wocked till I fell out of de nest. An' I hurted my head. An' I yowled. An' den mamma tame an' picked me up, an' dere wasn't any chee or any nest any more, an' I didn't have no fevvers, an' mamma didn't have no wingses at all."

The Tiger and the Insect

The Tiger emphasized and punctuated her sister's story with so many ecstatic pinches that in self-defence I moved the children from their perch to the floor,—a proceeding of which they seemed to disapprove, so I too sat upon the floor and told of some childhood dreams of my own that were so fantastic that I had not forgotten them. The children listened with staring eyes and mouths agape, and when I paused there was a demand for more. It was the first appreciative audience I had ever found for my dream-stories, for my brothers had always laughed at them, so I did my best until the children's faces warned me that my tales were taking color from the deepening twilight. Quickly lighting the gas and drawing the shades I told the most rollicking child-stories I could recall. These made the children laugh heartily and start a romp. Following their parent's custom in such cases, I too sprawled upon the rug and took part in the fun. Soon the Tiger suggested:

"Let's play animals. Let—me—hee. De Insec' an' I'll be tats, an' yoube a mouse, an' we'll mate b'lieve tatch you."

"Oh, Tig! A mouse is such a mean little animal."

While the struggle was at its height, I heard the rings of the portiere rattle.

"Den be a wat; wats is lots bidder dan mouses. Tum on, Incie."

The proposed change was not for the better, so far as my sensibilities were concerned, but the children quickly assumed their feline parts and sprang at me, seizing parts of my clothing with their teeth, and shaking their heads vigorously, supposing they were shaking their prey. They were so violent that I feared they would break their teeth, each of which, as their mother had truly declared, was prettier and dearer than any pearl. They made believe, too, that their adorable fingers were cats' claws, but as these tickled instead of scratching, I was soon rolling, and writhing, and laughing convulsively. While the struggle was at its height I heard the rings of the portieres rattle and Norah's voice announcing:

"Mr. Wayne Stryver."

"Tell him——" But it was too late, for Mr. Stryver was already a beholder of the scene, and as Norah had impertinently remained between the portieres to look at the romp, Mr. Stryver was unable to retire. As I cast off my tormentors and wished I could shrink into nothingness, he leaned forward,

extended two long arms, said, "Permit me?" took my hands, and raised me to my feet as easily as if I had been a feather instead of a very solid bit of human nature. I succeeded in saying "Thank you," but, if looks could kill, my two nieces would have dropped dead. So would Mr. Stryver, had I dared to look at him. He said quickly:

"Your sister sent me word a day or two ago to call this evening, and to come early, and——"

"But——" the Tiger interrupted, as I glanced furtively into the mirror and Mr. Stryver considerately looked at the Tiger. In our part of the West it is bad form to have mirrors in parlors, so I had advised Kate to drape the glass which was part and parcel of her parlor mantel; but how I did bless that mirror as for a few seconds I reduced the puff-ball effect of my hair and wished I could as easily apply a puff of powder to my blazing cheeks! "But," said the Tiger, "you've 'poiled our romp, hoe you'll have to hwing us, like you do your sister's little dirls, 'tause papa hays dat when we dets wound up we've dot to be tept doein' till we begin to wun down. Tum along an' hwing us!"

"Er—I'm sure your aunt won't approve of such gymnastic exercises," said Mr. Stryver. As he spoke his face and pose expressed abject terror, so I scented an opportunity for revenge. I did not know what sort of gymnastics was referred to, but from Mr. Stryver's manner it was evident that his sense of dignity was concerned, so I would insist. It was not his fault that I had been humiliated a moment or two before, but I was not in the humor to be just.

"Ain't you doein' to bedin?" the Tiger asked.

"Indeed he is!" said I, so emphatically, though I endeavored to don my sweetest smile, that Mr. Stryver assumed the expression of a not entirely-resigned martyr going to the stake, and said, "Your will is law." Placing his hand under the Tiger's shoulders, he lifted the child till her head was at the level of his own and swung her to and fro like a pendulum, all the while keeping his face hidden by her head and its great mop of golden hair.

I was disappointed. The exercise did not compel the slightest abatement of Mr. Stryver's customary dignity, for he stood as straight

as the gatepost of which he and his kind reminded me.

"Hwing me de uvver way!" said the Tiger.

"Impossible!" the young man exclaimed in a manner that would have appalled an adult. But it was wasted upon the children, for the Tiger said—almost growled:

"But I want you to!" I did not know what "the uvver way" might be, but I made haste to say, as playfully and viciously as a cat toying with a mouse:

"The Tiger's will is law in this house." Mr. Stryver's face was positively ghastly with pallor and distortion as he placed the Tiger on her feet.

"Put your foots apart!" said the Tiger. "Now lift me up."

"Tiggie, I must beg your aunt to forbid so ridiculous an exhibition. When only the family are present——"

"Well, ain't Auntie Nell one of de tamily?" I said nothing, but smiled assent. "Ain't you doein' to bedin?" the Tiger continued.

Mr. Stryver looked desperate; for a moment I was sure that he thought of dashing

from the room and the house. The Tiger jumped up and down impatiently, and roared:

"Any time dis week!"

Mr. Stryver placed his feet after the manner of the Colossus of Rhodes; he leaned forward, again took the Tiger in hand, and swung her back and forth in the Gothic angle he had extemporized. The Tiger screamed joyously, but soon she shouted:

"Hing de hwing hong!" And the Insect, who was looking on enviously, added:

"An' do it wight away!"

"Not for worlds!" gasped Mr. Stryver. The Tiger began to cry, and to utter some notes indicative of bad temper, and the Insect made haste to assist.

"Please don't be cruel to the little dears!" said I, and I tried to put pathos into my voice. Mr. Stryver began, through closed teeth, it seemed to me, to intone some doggerel to the air of "He Sighed for the Love of a Lady," from Gilbert and Sullivan's "Yeoman of the Guard," the Tiger roaring the response to the first line:——

Swing, swing, a song, oh!
"Hwing me—a hong, oh!"

Of a dear little girl who would swing so high,
And swing so fast she would almost fly,
Till up in the clouds she'd seem to lie ;
And her toes would nearly kick the sky,
And to snatch the moon and stars she'd try,
This dear little love of a lady.

"Now, me!" exclaimed the Insect, taking the appropriate position in front of her sister, as that young person was dropped to the floor with far more force than was necessary.

"Some other day, Incie," said Mr. Stryver, with a glance at me that would have melted a heart of stone. But I said:

"Oh, 'twould seem like favoritism to refuse."

So he repeated the performance; even Norah saw it, for she chanced to enter with a despatch. Begging Mr. Stryver to be seated, and assuring him that he had earned some rest, I opened the despatch, which seemed to have been delayed somewhere.

"Is dat from your hweetheart, like all de uvvers?" asked the Tiger. "But I dess it ain't, 'tause it don't heem to make you happy."

I suspect I looked annoyed and indignant, for I read:

"I forgot it was my day at home, but I can trust you to do the honors. Be your sweetest self. If Mr. Stryver calls, you must." KATE.

'Twas no wonder that I frowned and bit my lip, and otherwise betrayed my indignation to the searching eyes of the Tiger. Of one thing I was quickly resolved: I would that very evening put a large piece of my mind in a letter to Kate. I had known and escaped from several married women who had a mania for matchmaking. I would not hurry away from my sister, or even quarrel with her, but she should be made to know that I would not endure dictation regarding my manner to young men.

As I raged to myself the Tiger approached me, put her hands on my knees, looked soulfully up into my face, and said, with her heart in her voice:

"I'm awful horry dat your hweetheart wrote humfin' dat made you feel hoe bad."

"Tig," said I, snappishly, "don't be silly! This despatch is from your mother, explaining something she had forgotten."

"I beg your pardon," said Mr. Stryver, "but isn't your sister at home?"

"No; her husband suddenly took her to the Catskills this afternoon—so suddenly, indeed, that she forgot that it was her customary day at home."

"Indeed? I'm so glad to hear of it, for her sake. If you'll kindly excuse me I'll hurry to my sister and tell her the good news. She has been saying for weeks that she greatly wished your sister might have some change and rest."

Fortunately the children did not tell him that his sister already knew it, she having been one of my callers, so Mr. Stryver departed, and I hurried the children to bed. Then I wrote a strong letter to Kate, and to make sure of its strength I rewrote it, and I continued to rewrite till near midnight, without expressing myself to my entire satisfaction.

"Be your sweetest self. If Mr. Stryver calls, you must."

Oh——oh——oh!

CHAPTER VI

The Sky is Cleared

NORAH roused me in the morning with:

"A letter for you, miss."

"Bring it in," I replied. It was from Kate, so I expected a continuation and amplification of her despatches of the previous day. I read:

DEAR NELL: Just a line. Harry snatched my last despatch from me and signed it when it was but half finished, for the train was about to leave a station and he said those country telegraph operators were slow at best. I can't remember at what word I stopped, but what I had begun to say was that if Mr. Stryver called you must explain that I had been unexpectedly taken to the country for a few days. I had specially asked him to call yesterday evening, for Harry had wanted to have a quiet business chat with him, which was impossible at the office. I tried to telegraph the additional words, but Harry persisted in making me enjoy the scenery with him until he said it would be too late to get anything on the wires in time to be of any service. Besides, he said that you were my sister, so you probably had sense enough to explain, and he was

sure that Mr. Stryver had enough sense of propriety to excuse himself when he learned that I was not at home.

Love my darlings for me with all your might. More soon.

Your loving sister, KATE.

How rapidly, and into what small bits, I tore all the letters I had written the night before! How gleefully I stood upon them and spurned them with my feet! What dreadful names I called myself, as in an agony of contrition I looked up at a picture of Kate that hung on the wall, and begged the dear girl to forgive me for having suspected her of an unsisterly impertinence! I was so humiliated and rejoiced, so happy and so sorry, all in a moment, that I was unconscious of not being alone until I heard a loud whisper:

"Sh—h–h, Incie! You mustn't disturb her. Don't you hee dat hyee's hayin' her pwayers in fwont of mamma, djus' like we's done, 'tause mamma's dawn away?"

"Auntie Nell isn't praying, dear," I said, "at least, not in the way you mean. But when did you say your prayers in front of your mother's picture? I was present at your

" Hyee's hayin' her pwayers in fwont of mamma, djus' like we's done."

devotions last night, but I saw nothing of the sort."

The Tiger looked embarrassed, and then looked down into the upturned face of her sister, who seemed to wonder whether both had not done something wrong.

"Well, you hee," the Tiger explained, "We didn't like to let you know dat kneelin' down by you didn't make us feel 'zackly like as if you was mamma. So after you went out of de room las' night we bofe dot out of bed, an' turned up de light, an' looked up at mamma's pittcher, an' hed our pwayers all over aden. We 'plained it to de Lord, so he wouldn't wonder why we hed de hame pwayer all over aden hoe hoon. An' we wants our bweakfasts, wight 'twaight away. You don't fink it was bein' not-lovin' to you, do you?"

"No—a thousand times no," said I, dropping on my knees, clasping the little dears in my arms, and silently offering a new prayer all my own, which was interrupted by——

"'Tause if you don't, we want our bweakfasts wight 'twaight away. We didn't want to disturb you, but we've been awful hungry for 'bout a hour."

"'Bout a hundred hours," said the Insect, as she caressed her waist pathetically.

"Scamper !—both of you, and tell Norah to serve breakfast at once. Don't wait for me. I shall feel hurt if you make believe that I'm company any longer. Real mamma's aren't company, so make-believe mammas mustn't be. Hurry—trottybugs !"

"Twottybuds !" echoed the Insect, with the face of one who had just received an inspiration. "Twottybuds !" Down she went on her hands and knees and crawled rapidly from the room. The Tiger noted my astonishment and explained :

"Bugs twots on deir fwont foots an' hind foots too, don't dey ?" Then she too went out of the room on all fours and the two raced down the hall to the dining-room, giggling and chuckling, and the Tiger shouting :

"We're a nuvver kind o' fings," and the Insect responding, with an ecstatic squeal :

"Twottybuds !"

Immediately after breakfast I took the children across the street into the park, and by easy stages up the long stairway to the high ground above, then past some colleges

and schools to another park to which Harry and Kate had introduced me and of which I had become very fond. It was New York's "Riverside"—a narrow strip of wooded ground a mile and a half long, which sloped abruptly down to the Hudson River, across which the Palisades formed a grand background for an ever-changing panorama. At the top of the slope was a promenade, protected by a low broad wall on which the children liked to sit, and between the promenade and the residences were two or three drives, a bicycle-path and a bridle-path, all of them well shaded. These ways were generally dotted with people who seemed happier than other New Yorkers, perhaps because for the time being they were nearer to nature.

Over the wall of the promenade we could look down into the tops of trees great and small, and across the trees at the river, alive with boats of all kinds, and the children, who had often been taken there by their parents, could and did instruct me greatly in the varieties of marine craft, for at home the largest boat I had ever seen, except in pictures, was a skiff on a little mountain lake; when I reached

New York I did not know market-sloops from the sloops-of-war of which I had read in history lessons at school. The children gladly answered my questions, but when one day, with my heart full of patriotic pride, I called their attention to an approaching battleship the Tiger exclaimed:

"'Fweshwater!' Dat's what papa calls his fwends dat don't know one kind of boat from anuvver."

"But, Tiggie," said I, "do look at it! 'Tis long, low, white, with a circular turret at each end, like all the pictures I've seen of our country's battleships."

"It's only a fewwyboat!" said the Tiger contemptuously, "an' de turrets, as you call 'em, is only pilot-houses. Don't you hee dere ain't no cannons 'tickin' out of 'em?"

I had to admit that I did, now that my attention was called to the supposed turrets, but I said:

"Do you think 'Freshwater' a nice name to apply to your Auntie Nell, merely because she came from the inner part of our big American world?"

"Inner part?—de real inhide?" asked the Tiger, looking awestruck.

I called their attention to an approaching battleship.

"Yes, and——"

"Why, Nowah hays dat's where de bad place is, an' de ol' bad man lives dere, an' all de peoples is bad. Was you bad, an' died, an' went dere? An' how did you det out aden? Was you made dood?"

The Insect looked at me pitifully and her sweet little mouth quivered as she said:

"Don't want no Auntie Nell dat's been in de bad place."

This jumble of geography of worlds seen and unseen amused me, but I made haste to explain the difference, and to promise myself that Kate should ask Norah to restrict her imformation to less gloomy subjects.

About this time the fresh westerly wind of the previous day came aslant from the forest-crowned Palisades, and its purity reminded me again of its birthplace out in my own beloved mountains, and again I enjoyed it and revelled in it, and imagined it a great wireless telephone that was bringing me messages and pictures from home. I fear that I did some unconscious posing, for the Tiger called me back to reality by saying:

"Aunty Nell, you look like mamma when

she's listenin' at de nurs'ry door, to know if de Insec's wakin' up. What you been hearin'?"

"The wind, dear—this good fresh wind that has come all the way from my home out West."

"Did de wind talk to you?"

"N—yes,—or I thought it did."

"Den I dess it did, 'tause it talks to me humtimes, an' tells me where it tums from, an' what it's looked at. An' papa likes me to tell him all 'bout what de wind tells me, an' he listens to me ever so tareful, 'till mamma hays, 'Harry, 'top windin' dat child up!' An' den papa breeves unhappy, an' den he 'tops. Hay, Auntie Nell, where is de place where mamma is?"

"The Catskills, dear."

"Doodness dracious! What tynd of tats is dey, an' what does dey till? An' what does mamma want to hee 'em do it for?"

"I want mamma to tum home," added the Insect. "Don't want her to hee any tats hurt fings, 'tause it'll hurt her dee feelin's."

"Catskills is the name of a part of the country—some mountains, dear, that haven't anything to do with cats and killing. I don't know where they got their name."

"Dat's too bad. 'Tause mebbe dey tood take de name back an' have it changed, like mamma does wiv hum fings hyee buys."

"I want mamma to tum home!" said the Insect again.

"She will come, dear, as soon as she finds the good things she went for."

"What tynd of fings?"

"Oh, a great lot of rest and strength, and a heart full of songs and laughs. She doesn't want them for herself, but so that she can put more happiness into her dear little girls."

"Doodness dracious!" exclaimed the Tiger. "If she puts more happy into me I'll be so full dat I'll hwell up an' bust all to pieces." She mentally contemplated this result a moment and continued, "An' I don't fink dat would be nice, 'tause it would make an awful muss."

"One of my dollies busted once," said the Insect, "an' we touldn't det all de insides of her out of de tarpet for days an' days."

The Tiger began to explain "Little dirls' insides, Incie, ain't——" but I hastened to offer a new topic for consideration. At that instant a bicyclist in extreme wheeling costume swept

past us and both children screamed in chorus: "Dimme a wide! Dimme a wide!"

Quickly I covered each little mouth with a hand, but the wheelman turned, dismounted before us, raised his peaked cap and disclosed the face of Mr. Wayne Stryver. The children clapped their hands and exclaimed:

"Hooray!"

"This is an unexpected pleasure," said Mr. Stryver to me. I suppose he said it in his customary important manner, as if he were imparting information of great consequence, but his unconventional dress—short trousers, long stockings, and a close-fitting "jersey,"—made him appear an ordinary mortal. "I hope," he continued, "that you too ride a wheel, for my sister and I would be glad to have you accompany us in some of our jaunts. It takes but a few moments for bicyclists to leave New York's brick and stone and mortar behind them and get into the real world—the hills and rocks and woods. Across the river my sister and I have a favorite route, of five or six miles, entirely through natural forest."

"Unfortunately for me," I replied, "there's not a single mile of road near my home that a

bicyclist could climb or descend. Some men from the East brought wheels with them, with serious results. So I've never learned."

"How sad! But I'm sure Mr. Lintrey, your brother-in-law, would be glad to teach you. He is a capital rider; so is your sister. Many ladies have learned wheeling on the street in front of your sister's home; 'tis so quiet there—comparatively. If——"

"Dimme a wide! Dimme a wide!" the children repeated. Mr. Stryver smiled and said:

"In a moment, children. You see, Miss Trewsome, they learned the trick from their father, and they've seen me amusing my sister's children in the same way, so if you'll excuse me I'll indulge them a moment or two."

Perching the Insect on the seat he pushed the wheel to and fro, while the Tiger, running backward in front of it, beamed upon her sister, who seemed immersed in bliss, though she soon said:

"Now div Tiggie a wide."

The centre of bliss was shifted as the Tiger mounted the wheel, though the Insect looked serenely happy while Mr. Stryver pushed and

turned and chatted—really chatted, and naturally,—with the rider. He took long steps and carried himself well, yet he looked like a man—not like a post or a tailor's sign, and I found myself imagining that but for my presence he might have been merry in the swinging incident of the previous evening.

"Oh, dear!" sighed the Tiger, as she was helped from the wheel. "Auntie Nell, I wish you'd doe back to our house, so it wouldn't be unpolite for him to doe on widin' us."

"Tiggie!" I exclaimed, as Mr. Stryver's cheeks reddened beneath their brown.

"Well, dat's what he hed."

"Oh, Tiggie!—I beg your pardon, but I expressed no wish that Miss Trewsome would go home. 'Twould have been impossible to have such a wish."

"Well, mate her doe home, anyhow. You tan do dat, tan't you?"

The young man looked doubtful as he glanced at me, and I laughed to relieve him of further embarrassment. When at last the children and I did "doe home"—for Mr. Stryver showed no inclination to leave us, and I insisted that he must not lose his

ride, I had promised to ask Harry to teach me bicycling if only that I might persuade Kate to go out with me after her return, so that she should not lose the strength which she was expected to bring back from the Catskills.

CHAPTER VII

For Kate's Sake

When the summer sun shines, the residential parts of New York are the hottest bits of the world I have ever known, though I once accompanied my father through the arid regions of Arizona, New Mexico, and California, where 'tis said the thermometers have to be lengthened an inch or two, so the mercury can go as high as the heat impels. But in those countries no continuous walls exclude the wind. In New York the unchanging mass of brick and stone—house-walls, sidewalks and pavements—are storage batteries of the sun's heat-current, and they give forth as generously as they receive.

In our house out West we do much baking and roasting in a tin structure called a "reflector," which stands in front of a big kitchen fireplace, arrests the heat rays and reflects them from its inclined surfaces upon whatever is in the pans. Similarly I was often baked

and roasted, when I went out in New York, by the sun's heat which was turned toward me by walls and pavements. The heat stifled me; it made me apoplectic, and faint, and frantic, though the month of June had not ended, and when I tried to rally myself by full breathing, which was our family's remedy for every physical discomfort, the air itself seemed to have fainted, so weak and lifeless was it.

I went through such an experience after returning from Riverside Drive with the children, for I had been obliged to make a half-hour shopping tour. I reached Kate's apartment, and dropped upon a lounge with a cold, wet handkerchief on my face, and a fan in my hand, to try to recover from the dreadful heat, when Norah knocked at my door and repeated the familiar announcement:

"A despatch, miss." It read:

"'Tis so very cold here that I am sure a cool wave has struck New York. Ask Norah for the children's heavier clothing." KATE.

I sprang from the lounge and looked at the thermometer; it was at eighty-four only, for the sun touched but one wall of the house, yet

I lost forever my faith in thermometers. Nevertheless I shouted :

" Norah, do find for me some of my sister's thinnest, coolest summer things, no matter how old." At home we wear but one thickness throughout the year.

As the children were Kate's own, her orders regarding their dress deserved respect, so I looked for them,—after I had made myself comfortable. I found them playing as happily as if there were no such thing as heat ; indeed, a pleasant breeze was sweeping through the house. It seemed impossible that several squares away, and at the street level, I had suffered so greatly. No sooner did the children see me than I heard a joyous squeal and a deep heart-tone, and both squeal and heart-tone said :

" Mam—ma ! "

They were upon me in an instant, the Insect crawling across the floor and hugging my feet, while the Tiger's embrace was as much higher as her arms could reach, and vigorous enough to disturb my balance, so I carefully sank to the floor and rolled the precious couple into a delicious armful. No longer was there any

doubt of my success at "playing mamma," if the dear things had unconsciously given me their mother's own name. Suddenly the Insect wailed:

"'Tain't mamma a bit! It's only Auntie Nell in mamma's tloses."

The Tiger struggled like a wild-cat, freed herself from my arms, and exclaimed:

"You's a mean cheat! You's too hateful for anyfin'! I don't love you any more!"

Then both children cried angrily and pitifully. I did not attempt to quiet them, for I too began to cry, and to wish I had never come East, and had never seen my nieces, and that Kate had never married, so I hurried to my room and locked the door. I soon regained self-control, but I did wish that Kate had taken the children to the country with her, where undoubtedly their father could have given them most of his time. As my father had provided more money than my trip required, I found myself planning a surprise party for Kate. I would take the children to the Catskills at my own expense, where they could be mamma-babies to their heart's content—the ungrateful little wretches!

The Tiger and the Insect

I heard my door-knob turn, and asked:

"Who is it?"

"It's us," replied the Tiger. "We've dot dood aden, an' we want to tell you all 'bout it."

I admitted them, and said:

"Auntie Nell has done all in her power to make you children happy. Do you think your treatment of me, a few moments ago, showed much gratitude?"

"No, we don't. 'Twas bwatitude,—dat's what it was, an' we's de bwats dat made it dat way."

"Bwats, an' bwats, an' bwats," added the Insect.

"You hee," said the Tiger, "you 'pwised us almos' to pieces, 'tause mamma's been dawn 'bout a year, an' we want her hoe much dat we dunno what to do. Humtimes we fordets 'bout it a little while, an' den, all-of-a-hudden, we 'members it as hard as tumblin' down 'tairs. An' when we haw you tummin' we didn't hee noffin' but de tloses—mamma's tloses, so we fought you was mamma, weally an' twuly, an' we was so dis'pointed when we found out you wasn't, dat I dess our twolley slipped off, as

papa hays when men in de tweet hays bad words. An' we told awful lies, 'tause we do love you lots."

"Loves you milluns an' twilluns," the Insect asserted. "An' we hed our pwayers 'bout it. Told de Lord how bad we was, an' asked him to hend down an angel to 'pank us —not too bid an angel, doe."

"Dat's de twoof," said the Tiger. "An' we pwomised to love you lots harder, an' play you was mamma as hard as we tood, if—only you mustn't—I mean, we tood do it lots easier if you wouldn't wear mamma's tloses."

"Let's kiss and be friends," said I, and we did. Then I begged them to let me rest, so they hurried back to their play, while I, feeling to the uttermost what it is to be a guilty thing, slipped from Kate's cool garments, into my hot ones, went out again into the wilting heat, and remained until I had found some very thin house attire that was as unlike Kate's as possible, both in color and cut.

On my return I found a letter from Kate—eight pages of instructions and of reminders of what she had already taught me—about the children, of course. And she sent the

children her love, and told me just how it was to be given to them, and the entire letter was quite as idiotic as if written from a lunatic asylum.

In the afternoon Mrs. Lyle, Mr. Stryver's sister bounced into Kate's apartment in bicycling costume that made her look like a girl of sixteen, and also so bewitching, in her short skirt, gay jacket and jaunty cap, as to make me wish that I too knew how to ride.

"I ran in for a moment only, my dear," she said; "I've left my precious wheel at the door, and some one may steal it should the door-boy be called away for a moment. But Wayne told me you were going to have Harry teach you wheeling, so that you may ride with Kate. She used to take long rides, before she became so delicate, and I hope her life in the mountains will make her fit to do so again. But why not let me teach you, so you can give her a surprise when she returns? You can get so much confidence in yourself, after a week or two of practice, that you'll be ready to go out with her before she can have wasted all her strength on the children—oh, I know her nature and her ways! She has two

wheels in the basement, and you can't spoil either of them while you're learning, if you'll let me take you in hand. Besides, your first lesson or two will be given at a bicycle school, where only women are admitted, and the instructors are women, so you won't be compelled to feel uncomfortable!"

I hesitated. At home I would have ventured on any horse that had a bit in his mouth, but the wheel was an unknown quantity to me, so I had already repented my promise to Wayne Stryver.

"I do believe you're afraid!" Mrs Lyle continued, as she playfully turned my face to the light. "You must have been on horseback many times? Yes? Well, so have I, for I was brought up on a farm. I assure you that the wheel is far less tricky than the best family horse alive. Besides, you would look simply superb, a-wheel. Do say you will—and to-day! I'll bring you a skirt that will do, if you can't find one of Kate's."

"The children—" I began, but the little woman said:

"Bring them to my house, after the Insect has taken her nap. They're always happy

with my little ones, and my maid is a wonder with children."

So by the middle of the afternoon I was feeling like a fool, while a strong, watchful woman was giving me my first lesson at the bicycle school, and Mrs Lyle was assuring me that I was doing wonderfully well, for a beginner. Indeed, what she herself taught me about balancing soon gave me so much confidence in myself that I dreamed the following night of dashing through space and across several mountains.

"Now, my dear," said Mrs Lyle, as we parted, "let me come for you immediately after breakfast in the morning, and see that one of Kate's wheels is in order, and take you up to the bicycle path of Riverside Drive. There'll be scarcely any one there so early. I'll bring Wayne, to get your wheel up there, for of course you can't be expected to ride up hill after a single lesson. Don't fear; he sha'n't be present at the exercises. We'll leave him at one end of the path, to amuse the children, whom I suppose you'll feel you must take with you."

"Auntie Nell," asked the Tiger, as soon as

we had left Mrs Lyle's house, "what's a doddess?"

"I don't know, dear. Something peculiar to New York, I suppose. Do remind me to ask your mother when she returns."

"Well, I fink it's humfin' like you, 'tause de Lyle dirls hed dat deir Uncle Wayne heard deir mamma talk 'bout takin' you to a bicycle 'cool, an' he hed, 'De idea of dem ord'nary women teachin' a doddess!' an' he made an awful face 'bout it. Dorofy Lyle twied to make a face like it, an' hyee looked like a hick tat."

"I should hope so, if her uncle talked such nonsense," I said, for the meaning of "doddess" came to my mind. My oldest brother, while at college, had written some rhymed lines to a college-town "Goddess" who afterward eloped with a handsome gambler, and I had never let him hear the end of it.

CHAPTER VIII

More Bicycling

Two letters from Kate awaited me when I awoke next morning, and both were silly in the extreme, though I had always thought my sister a paragon of womanly sense. One, which was full of adoring expressions about her children, would have been fairly rational had it been written in ordinary English, but the words were spelled as if the writer were suffering from a complication of phonetic reform and of every known imperfection and impediment of speech; in short, it was written in "baby-talk" and, to make it worse, Harry had added a long postscript in the same jargon.

The other letter was entirely about me, and though abounding in sisterly affection and solicitude, it contained so many cautions that I wondered how my sister had dared to leave me alone, and whether she imagined that young women who had been reared anywhere but in New York were entirely destitute of manners and tact.

But after breakfast I read aloud the letter about the children, and was richly repaid for the effort. It really was an effort, but the little dears gave me great assistance, and promptly, too. Much that was Greek to me was as plain to them as the Book of Revelations to my mother's colored "help," and so the reading elicited squeals, and chuckles, and giggles, and grunts, and ecstacies, the latter sometimes becoming so violent that the reading had to be stopped while the children rolled on the floor in each other's arms, or pinched and tickled each other. When the reading ended the Tiger asked:

"Is dat all?"

"Yes dear."

"Dimme de letter. Where's mamma's name?"

"Why, at the end,—here," and I placed a finger on the signature. The Tiger placed a chubby finger beside mine, pushed my hand aside, dropped on her knees and kissed her mother's name several times. Then she called the Insect, who repeated the operation.

"Bless your dear great hearts!" said I, "How did you think to do that?"

"Why, it's de way mamma does to your name, when hyee dets a letter from you."

"An' from papa too, when he has to be 'way fum home, humtimes," added the Insect.

Quickly I put the letter to my own lips and followed the children's example, and closed my eyes to picture dear Kate rejoicing over one of my scatter-brain letters. I kept my eyes closed a moment or two ; when I opened them, the Tiger said :

"Auntie Nell, you looked as if you was hayin' your pwayers."

"I'm glad my looks told the truth, dear."

"Auntie Nell," said the Insect, with a face full of something new, "I wants to w'ite a letter to my mamma."

"Hooray!" shouted the Tiger. "Hoe do I. Tell you what; I'll w'ite mine, an' you w'ite the Insec's for her, 'tause she tan't w'ite."

"And can you?"

"'Deed I tan. I's w'ote letters to papa evwy time he's been 'way. Tum on, Incie."

I gave the Tiger paper and pencil and seated myself at Kate's desk, with the Insect in my lap.

"Let — me — hee," mused the Insect.

"'Mamma dee, I wants you to tum home. I's divved your name to one of my dolls—de dee-est one, wiv de nicest eyes, hoe as to put her over my face when I takes my nap, or de bid hleep, hoe I tan mate b'lieve lots dat you's doin' it you own heff. I's dlad Auntie Nell's dot a hweetheart.'"

"Incie," said I, "little girls shouldn't write anything but the truth."

"Well, dat's de twoof."

"Um—perhaps so, but you should say two sweethearts, for I love you and Tiggie exactly alike."

"Oh," said the Insect loftily, "I didn't mean us. I meant Mr. 'Twyver."

"Nonsense, child! Little girls shouldn't get the silly habit of some older ones, who talk as if every man who speaks politely to a lady is in love with her. I know a great many young men, but none of them is my sweetheart."

"*He* is," the Insect asserted, with great positiveness for a child little more than four years old. "'Tause he looks at you like papa does at mamma—but he waits till you ain't lookin'. Tiggie an' me haw him do it."

"Nonsense! Besides, young men are as silly as—oh, as silly as little girls. What else do you want to say to your mamma?"

"But he does."

"Oh, let him!—there's no law against it. 'A cat may look at a king.'"

"Tee-hee," giggled the Insect. "Him's a pwetty bid tat!—lots bidder dan Hnoozer. An' lady tings is tweens—all de 'tory-books hays hoe. Tiggie, Auntie Nell hays dat Mr. 'Twyver's a tat! Miaouw!—miaouw!—miaouw!"

"Miaouw!—miaouw!—miaouw!" the Tiger responded gleefully.

"Go on with your letters!" said I severely. "You're so slow about it that I don't believe you love your mother."

This assertion changed the topic of conversation effectively. It even brought tears to the Insect's eyes as she continued:

"Tell mamma 'I was doein' to fink of you all de time, when I found you was dawn away. But I didn't, an' I's awful bad. I s'apped myseff for it till it hurted awful.'"

I kissed the Insect and did my best to console her. Soon she was able to continue:——

"'Auntie Nell is weal dood to us, but if hyee finks hyee's bein' mamma, hyee's awful mistaken. Hyee don't tiss us de hame way. But hyee's dee, an' we muvvers her lots. But hyee ain't nice to Hnoozer. I fink Hnoozer won't be happy till you tum back. Here's lots of tisses for you.' Well, I dess dat's all."

"Very good," said I, as I began to fold the letter. The Insect stopped me with:

"How's mamma to know who done the letter if my name ain't on it?"

"I beg your pardon. Here's the pen."

The Insect took it, and inked her fingertips as she adjusted it; then she said:

"You mus' push it for me. Take hol' of my han'."

I obeyed, and together we traced "Your loving Insect" in lines that suggested the crawling of a spider that had escaped from an inkstand. Again I began to fold the letter, but the Insect stopped me with:

"You didn't put in de tisses."

"Oh, mamma will find them, dear."

"How tan hyee, when my mouf is here an' her mouf's way off dere? Dimme de pen hum more."

She took it, and rolled her head and tongue in laborious union while she traced something that started with a curved line and slowly elaborated itself into something that resembled the crater-outline of a volcano. Then she placed her cherubic face upon it and kissed it many times, and lifting her face and showing ink-stained lips said:

"Dat's de way papa hends tisses to us when he's off twavellin'."

"That reminds me, Incie, that you've not said a word about your papa, in the letter. Don't you love him a little?"

"Of tourse I do. I love him lots, but he always knows it, an' no mistake, but mamma always wants to be told all 'bout it. Dat's how it is."

"Papa hays dat's de diff'ence 'tween mans an' womans," added the Tiger, whom I supposed was absorbed in her own letter. When she had covered a page of paper with pencil-marks resembling printed words of several languages, including Chinese tea-chest, she brought it to me, placed her pencil in my hand and said:

"Please dwaw a nice tiss for me?"

"I would, very gladly, if I could, dear, but I'm not sure that I know the shape of a kiss. Is it like a hole, such as the Insect made with the pen?"

"Why, it's a mouf—mamma's mouf, for me to tiss, an' den hyee takes de tisses off of it."

"Ah, I—see!" I looked at Kate's picture a moment or two, and tried to trace it, and shade the lips properly, but as my drawing-lessons had been but few I worked very slowly; besides, the work set me to thinking of the dear original. Both children stood at my elbows looking on; suddenly a little arm stole about my neck, and a warm cheek caressed mine, and the Tiger said:

"You looks as if you was tissin' it wiv your eyes! I love you lots for lookin' dat way."

"Me too!" said the Insect, impulsively dropping her head into my lap, and striking on the way the tip of the pencil so forcibly that the point proceeded to act as a dagger, to my great discomfort. I dropped the letter; the children took turns at kissing the pencilled imitation of their mother's lips, and manifested an inclination to continue indefinitely, but the arrival of Mrs. Lyle and her brother prevented.

We were soon on our way to the bicycle path on Riverside Drive, where, fortunately for me, there was only one other learner. Mrs. Lyle treated me as carefully as if I were glass; she helped me to mount, and she and her brother ran at either side of me as I attempted gentle inclines and elevations, and they spared me some tumbles while I was trying to learn to turn. With attendants so careful I could not help feeling quite safe and confident. Indeed, it seemed ridiculous that a girl who had been on horseback should not be able to control so tiny a thing as Kate's bicycle, which had no will of its own. The motion of the wheel, too, was so easy and exhilarating that I was impatient for the time when I could glide gracefully up and down the path, as Mrs. Lyle did while I rested.

My lesson lasted an hour, and my teacher-assistants praised me so highly for my progress and fearlessness that I had an impulse to "steal a march" on them. While the children were scraping acquaintance with a baby whose mother was playing with it on a bench at the foot of a gentle slope, and I had just succeeded in making a turn, without assistance, at the

upper end of the path, I pushed the pedals vigorously and in an instant I was flying down the incline. The sensation was delightful, for several seconds, after which it became alarming. I felt like shouting for help, but it seemed to me I was a mile away from Mrs. Lyle. Besides, I had never allowed any one to help me when I was on a runaway horse, and was not a horse many times as large as a bicycle?

But a horse has a bit in his mouth, a bicycle has not; Kate's had not even a brake, and I had not yet been taught to check speed by pressing the edges of my shoe-soles to the sides of the front wheel tire. I was conscious of steering a curvilinear route, and that something heavy-footed, probably a horse, was following me. I knew that horses never ran upon anything they could avoid, so I hoped for the best, but I was glad when I reached the foot of the slope and began to ascend another gentle grade, which lessened my speed and enabled me to steer a straighter course. The footfalls behind me sounded closer and as I pedalled slower and with greater exertion, they were at my left, and passed on, and I saw a pair of broad shoulders and a large, flushed

face and two large inquiring eyes and I heard Mr. Stryver say:

"Splendid!—splendid!"

"How many miles have I come?" I asked as I was helped to dismount. Mr. Stryver smiled roguishly and replied:

"Almost half of one entire mile—though my heart has been in my mouth long enough for you to have ridden a hundred. A down-grade is very dangerous to a beginner, and bicycles are tricky brutes till one comes to know them well. Please don't try again, till you've had more experience!"

We walked back to Mrs. Lyle, Mr. Stryver pushing my wheel and talking of bicycles as western men talk of horses, while the Tiger and Insect followed at our heels and said amusing things to each other about the baby in whom they had been interested. While Mrs. Lyle scolded me kindly for my rashness and her brother begged me to be very cautious, the children stared curiously at the young man and the Tiger improved her first opportunity to ask:

"Mr. 'Twyver, when your heart was in your mouf, how did you det it out again?"

"Er—I suppose it readjusted itself—normally."

"Gwacious! What bid words! Was dat what made you look hoe funny at Auntie Nell when you was twottin' behind her?"

"Children, run away and play," said I.

"Well, we will, Auntie, when he tells us."

"I wasn't aware, Tiggie, that I looked funny; I'm sure I saw nothing humorous in the incident. I feared that Miss Trewsome might fall and be severely injured."

"You feared it just awful, didn't you? 'Tause you looked as if you did."

"Tiggie," said I, "what sort of boat is that?"

"Oh, dat's a 'team yacht."

"No—not the one I mean. Don't you see beyond the steam-yacht a—"

"Oh, dat's noffin' but a tommon hloop."

"But beyond the sloop also. Don't you see a little vessel making a great lot of smoke and steam?"

"Why, dat's only a tug-boat."

I knew as much, before I asked, but my questions had answered my purpose, which was to change the subject. Meanwhile Mrs.

Lyle had drawn her brother aside and was demanding some information regarding a tree into the top of which she looked as she leaned on the wall, so I improved the opportunity to say:

"Tiggie, 'tisn't good manners for little girls to question grown people about their looks and feelings. It was very, very kind of Mr. Stryver to follow me when I—when my wheel ran away with me, so it wasn't kind for you to talk to him of how he looked. Don't forget it—and don't ever do anything of the kind again. You made him feel awkward—uncomfortable. 'Twould make your mamma feel unhappy if she knew it."

"I wish mamma would tum home," said the Insect plaintively.

"I's awful horry I made him untomfortable," said the Tiger.

"I knew you would be, you dear honest little heart, as soon as you understood it."

"But I don't unnertan' it. I only b'lieves it, 'tause you tol' me, but I wish I did unnertan' it."

"You'll understand manners when you're older. But, while you're a little girl, do

remember not to talk to older people about themselves and their doings. The first purpose of manners is to keep everyone from feeling uncomfortable."

The Tiger's honest eyes looked so thoughtful that I knew she was taking her instruction to heart, so my mind was quite easy as I approached Mrs. Lyle and her brother in time to hear the end of a botanical description of chestnut blossoms. As the young man paused an instant, probably to recall an extra large Latin word, I heard the Tiger's voice saying:

"Mr. 'Twyver, I's horry I talked to you 'bout how you looked an' felt, 'tause Auntie Nell hays it made you untomfortable."

"Thank you, Tiggie—please don't think of it again. As I was saying, Miss Trewsome, the efflorescence of the chestnut—" and the dissertation was repeated in full, after which the Tiger said:

"But I tan't help finkin' 'bout it."

CHAPTER IX

A Browning Afternoon

"AUNTIE NELL," said the Tiger, after the Insect had been started at her afternoon nap, "do you know dat you haven't wed a hingle 'tory to me hince you tame here?"

"Tiggie dear," I replied, "do you know that you haven't asked me to read one?"

"Well," said the Tiger, after a big-eyed glance backward, "I 'pec' mebbe dat's de twoof. Huch a lot of fings has been happenin' dat I dess we've dot off of our tourse, as papa humtimes hays when we doe hailin' in a boat for hum place an' det to hum uvver place we never finked 'bout when we 'tarted. But I do like 'tories, an' lots of 'em."

"So do I, dear. Get me some of your story-books, if there are any that haven't been read aloud to you, and I will read as long as you like."

"Oh, we know all dem 'tories by heart. We want hum new ones."

"Very well, Auntie Nell will go out and buy a new story-book, and——"

"Oh, dat's too much bovver for you. Why don't you do like papa does? When we want a new 'tory he hays; 'All wight, bwing me a book out of de libwary—anyfin' 'll do.'"

"Anything?"

"Dat's what he hays. He's told us lots of lovely 'tories out of de hyclopedier, an' de Atlas,—an' de Bible of tourse, doe we teeps dat for new Hunday 'tories, 'tause he tells 'em all over aden 'fore we does to bed ev'ry night, all week long. Don't I wiss he was home now to do it! But de Insec' an' me tells de last ones to each uvver, after you's tissed us dood night an' dawn out of de nurs'ry."

"You shall hear new ones next Sunday, dear, and hear them every night through the week," I said, "but at present, let me see what books there are in the library."

"Oh, any one'll do," was the reply. As I looked toward the book-shelves I smiled, for the first title that caught my eye was "Poems by Robert Browning" and I wondered what story Harry could have found had the Tiger selected this in response to his request for "any book."

I opened a volume, turned the pages rapidly, and read the titles—"A Blot on the Scutcheon; a Tragedy," "The Return of the Druses; a Tragedy," "Luria; a Tragedy," "A Soul's Tragedy,"—a nice lot from which to select stories for children! "Dramatic Romances and Lyrics," in the same volume, was a little more promising, but the poems themselves were not, so I was about to close the book when I came face to face with a dear old acquaintance, and I asked:

"Did you ever hear the story of 'The Pied Piper of Hamelin'?"

"I dunno, 'tause de names humtimes ain't a bit like de 'tories. Papa told us a lot of lovely 'tories one time out of a book dat didn't have no name but ''Twonomy.' What do you fink o' dat? An' what's your 'tory 'bout?"

"Oh, about a funny-looking man that coaxed a lot of rats out of a town by playing a tune to them, and then he coaxed all the children, with another tune, to go into a mountain with him."

"Doodness dwacious! Tell me all 'bout it."

"Shan't we wait till the Insect wakes?"

"Oh, no, 'tause if it's dood you'll have to weed it lots more times." Then the Tiger seated herself on one of her own feet in a large rocking-chair, assumed an expectant attitude, and said, around and between two fingers which she had thrust into her mouth:

"Doe on."

I began, but in a moment, when I read the lines,

> "Rats!
> They fought the dogs and killed the cats,"

the Tiger removed her fingers from her mouth and exclaimed:

"Doodness dwacious! I'se dlad Hnoozer didn't live in dat town! How do you huppose little fings like wats tan till big fings like tats?"

"Perhaps cats were smaller in those days, dear, for it all happened hundreds of years ago. Let—me—see! Where were we? Um—m—

> 'Rats!
> They fought the dogs and killed the cats
> And bit the babies in the cradles——'"

The Tiger bounced from the rocking-chair and dashed from the room; I followed, and

found her in the nursery, peering into the Insect's crib. I drew her away and demanded an explanation.

"Why, you hee," said the Tiger looking shamefaced, "I heen a pittcher inside of my eyes. 'Twas a pittcher of de Insec' bein' bited by wats, an' it was hoe weal dat I had to wun an' till de hateful fings. Don't pittchers ever tum into your eyes, an' make you feel afterwards as if you'd like to hit 'em?"

"Yes, dear. But you needn't fear for the Insect; she's strong enough to kill a rat. Besides, your mother told me there were no rats in the house."

"Well, anyhow, I wish dat pittcher would doe out of my eyes. Hay, Auntie Nell, what made de mammas in dat 'tory let de wats bite de babies for?"

"They didn't let them, dear. I suppose it happened when the mammas weren't watching."

"Huh! I fink dat tynd of mammas didn't deserve to have any babies. Doe on."

I read on, but was stopped in an instant by a giggle over the line,

"Licked the soup from the cooks' own ladles."

"Now I'ze dot annuver pittcher inside of my eyes!" said the Tiger. "But it's a funny one. Djust fink of Nowah holdin' a ladle of houp for wats to lick! Tell you what,—let me doe det Nowah to tum in here, an' you wead her 'bout it, an' hee what hyee hays."

"But you won't have time to hear all the story, dear, if you stop me so often."

"Never mind Nowah, den. Doe on."

Again two fingers went into the Tiger's mouth, to be removed very soon by the line,

"Made nests inside men's Sunday hats."

"Dey toodn't do dat to papa's Hunday hat," chuckled the Tiger. "You know why? 'Tause he ain't dot no Hunday hat. Doe on."

So I read:

"And even spoiled the women's chats
By drowning their speaking
With shrieking and squeaking
In fifty different sharps and flats."

"I don't fink dat was a very big town," commented the Tiger, "if dere was only fifty different shops an' flats. Dere's more'n fifty flats in dis one block where we live, papa hays, an' as to shops——"

"I didn't say shops," I replied,—not very pleasantly, I fear, for I take pride in not having descended to Eastern women's way of ignoring the letter "r." "I said 'sharps'—'tis a musical term, as used in this story; so is 'flats.' Both words mean wrong ways of sounding notes."

"Dear me! I wish words wouldn't mean dif'rent fings! I had a pittcher inside my eyes of wats makin' noises in de flat houses an' shops where womens was talkin', an' now it's all 'poiled. Doe on."

I read without interruption for at least three minutes, but when I exclaimed, with Hamelin's troubled mayor,

> "Anything like the sound of a rat
> Makes my heart go pit-a-pat,"

the Tiger remarked:

"He was as 'fwaid of wats as womens is of mouses, wasn't he? What makes womens 'fwaid of mouses, anyhow? I fink a mouse is most as tunnin' as a baby, an' it makes me kwy when I hee 'em in twaps. Nowah's all de time tatchin' 'em. Doe on wiv de 'tory."

I read the description of the piper's entrance

and his appearance, the Tiger's eyes growing larger at each detail, but the line

"But lips where smiles went out and in"

caused the Tiger to exclaim :

"Dat's djust de way wiv mamma's lips, but I never knew how to tell 'bout 'em wight. I dess it was a pwetty hmart man dat w'ote dat 'tory, wasn't it, Auntie Nell?"

"Yes, dear."

"I wish I tood det him to tum here an' tell 'bout mamma's eyes too, an' papa's eyes an' mouf, so I'd know how to talk bout 'em to de Insec', an' hay humfin' besides 'dee' an' 'hweet,' 'tause dem two words ain't enough. Dey's got all wore out. Read hum more 'bout de funny man."

Again I read a few lines, but was stopped, after the following :

"It's as if my great-grandsire,
Starting up at the Trump of Doom's tone
Had walked this way from his painted tombstone,"

by an emphatic :

"Ugh! I don't unnertan' dat, but I don't fink it's a bit nice. Ow! It makes me feel all cweepy. What's it all 'bout? What's a dwate dwan'sire?"

"A great grandfather, dear—one's father's grandfather."

"Oh, dat's nice 'nough, 'tause I's dot one. It's papa's dwan'pa, an' he's a dee ol' man, an' divs us take an' tandy when we does to hee him. But what's dat uvver fin' you hed?—humfin' 'bout a twump. But I know what a twump is; it's humfin' 'bout playin' tards."

"Sh—h—h, dear! The trump I read about is something very different."

"Den dat's anuvver word dat means two fings! Ain't it humfin' awful?"

"Y—yes, dear."

"An' painted tomb'tone is awful, too. I know all 'bout it, 'tause last hummer, when we was in de tuntry, an' a dog tilled a titten dat de little dirl next door loved lots, de little dirl's papa put de titten in a hole in de dwound, an' painted a board wiv a pittcher of de titten, an' de titten's name, an' 'tuck it in de dwound an' hed it was a tomb'tone. But what does dwate-dwan'pas want of a tomb'tone? Dey don't have dead tittens, does dey?"

"No, dear—but if you don't stop thinking of such things you'll forget about the story."

"All wight. Doe on. I tan ask Norah 'bout de tomb'tone after you dets froo."

Resolving most earnestly to warn Norah against answering the child's questions on this gloomy subject, I read rapidly, and well, too, I thought, for the lines were so familiar that I could get their rhythm in spite of their ruggedness. Indeed, they came back to my memory, so that my eyes strayed from the book to the Tiger's face, which became intensely appreciative as the piper's playing was described:—

"And ere three shrill notes the piper uttered,
You heard as if an army muttered;
And the muttering grew to a grumbling,
And the grumbling grew to a mighty rumbling,
And out of the houses the rats came tumbling."

As I read these lines the Tiger wriggled and twitched and giggled, and at the last she shouted:

"Oh, isn't dat djolly! 'Out o' de houses de wats tame tumblin!' I tan djust hee 'em a-doin' it! Don't I wish Hnoozer tood have heen 'em! Hay, Auntie Nell, don't you weally b'lieve tats tan unner'tan' 'tories?—'tause I'd like you to wead dat to Hnoozer,

an' hee if hyee don't. Doe on—wead it hum more!"

On I went, and the Tiger seemed about to swallow her fingers when the poem carried the rats into the river, and the single survivor rehearsed his experiences. But when this veteran said:

> "So munch on, crunch on, take your nuncheon,
> Breakfast, supper, dinner, luncheon."

the Tiger released her fingers from their pretty prison, and exclaimed:

'Hay dat aden!—— 'munch on——crunch on,' hoe I tan 'member it. Do it weal hlow, like mamma does Bible verses for me to 'member."

I obeyed, and the Tiger repeated again and again, with extreme emphasis:

> "Hoe munch on—cwunch on—take your—nuncheon,
> Bweakfas'—hupper—dinner—luncheon,"

until she said, with the air of one who had accomplished a great task:

"Dere! I dess I dot it fast in my fink-box. Doe on."

I continued the story, and the Tiger followed

me closely with her eyes, as the children of Hamelin followed the piper into the cavern, but when I read, with my best dramatic force:

"The door in the mountain-side shut fast,"

and paused for effect, as I had been taught at the high school, where this poem had been one of our most exacting reading lessons, the Tiger said:

"Now take de mammas in."

"Which mammas, dear?"

"Why de children's mammas, of tourse."

"But they didn't go in."

"Why not?"

"Because—oh, the poet—the story-teller, didn't arrange for it."

"He didn't teep de children in de mountain wivout no mammas to take tare of 'em, did he?"

"Apparently he did."

"Den he was a mean ol' fing! He was too hateful for anyfin'. Mebbe he wasn't, doe. Doe on, an' hee if he didn't let de mammas in afterwards."

"I know he didn't, dear, for I've read the story often."

"Den mebbe de 'tory-teller fordot to tell 'bout it. Lots of people dat w'ites 'tories leaves out de best parts—dat's what papa hays humtimes. Djust fink how dem children wanted deir mammas after dey dot in dat big hole in de mountain, an' dot tired of de pipe-man's music, an' what fwolics dere'd be when all de mammas tame twottin' in! An' wouldn't it be djolly to be a mouse in de torner, an' hee it all! But I don't hee why de 'tory man fordot to let de mammas in. 'Tause who was to tomfort de children when dey dot hurt, when dey was playin'? An' who was to tie deir bibs on in de dinin'-room, an' to hear deir pwayers at night, an' put 'em to bed, an' tiss 'em awake in de mornin', an' tell 'em not to, when dey done naughty fings? An' I'll bet de children didn't take deir night-tloses wiv 'em, nor deir Hunday tloses, nor even deir dollies."

Again the Tiger's mouth absorbed the fingers and the child looked into vacancy while I resumed the reading. The fate of the little lame boy who was left behind, without any playmates, was unnoticed, and the moral embodied in the last line was received with

profound silence; the Tiger seemed unconscious that the reading had ended, but soon she said:

"How do you weally 'pose he fordot to put de mammas in?"

"Perhaps he didn't forget it, dear. The children were taken away to punish the mayor and corporation for not keeping their promise to pay the piper."

"But de mayor an' torporation wasn't mammas, was dey? Dey was mans, wasn't dey?"

"Yes, dear, but——"

"Well, den, de mammas wasn't to blame, was dey, for de pipe-man not dettin' his money?"

"Not in the least, dear. 'Twas all the men's fault."

"Well I fink mens is horrid—all but papa and dwate-dwan'pa, an' de man dat tol' de 'tory was horridest of all. *I* tood tell dat 'tory better dan him. If——"

An interruption in blue and gold, that trotted into the room and turned several somersaults on the rug, caused the Tiger to exclaim:

The Tiger and the Insect

"Incie dee, I wants to tell you a new 'tory. Once dere was a town wiv too many wats an' not 'nough Hnoozers. An' hoe de mayor an' de torpy—torpyhumfin' offered lots of money to whoever would det 'em wid o' de wats. An' along tame a pipe-man dat tood det anybody wid of anyfin', and he dwounded all de wats for 'em. But de mayor an' de torpyhumfin' wouldn't pay him. Hoe he made music for de children, an' all de children in de town twotted after him, an' he took 'em into a big hole in a mountain, an' hyutted de door after him.

"Pwetty hoon de mammas began to look for deir children, to hee what dey was doin', an' dere wasn't any children,—dere wasn't any children anywhere,—only one little lame boy, who I dess didn't have any mamma, 'tause he hed dere wasn't nobody to play wiv him. An' de mammas dwopped deir work an' asked the p'leecemen if dey'd found any lost children. An' de p'leecemen told 'em how it was, an' you djust bet dere was a hot time in de old town dat night! De mammas went to de papas, an' made 'em div 'em de money for de pipe-man, an' den dey all went up to the door of de

mountain-hole, an' dey made huch a noise dat de pipe-man toodn't hleep. An' dey made him unnertan' dat de fault wasn't deirs, but de childrens was deirs. An' dey divved him de money, to let 'em in. An' den dere was a dwate time, an' don't you fordet it. An' dey divved de pipe-man hum more money to let in de papas dat wasn't no mayors nor torpyhum-fin's. An' dey all 'tayed dere, to droe up wiv de tuntry, like papa hays we'll do when we all doe out to de mountains where our mamma tum from. An' de old mayor an' torpyhum-fin' dot to be 'tupid old fossils, like papa hays all mans is dat don't have children."

"Hooray!" squealed the Insect, while I wished there were a telephone to the spirit-land, so I might have the Tiger repeat the amended story to Mr. Browning.

CHAPTER X

A Visit to the Animals

LETTERS from Kate continued to arrive at the rate of two a day, and though they abounded in sisterly affection, as well as in exuberances which showed that the dear girl's health was already improving, there were oceans of ink lavished upon the children. I was told not only what to do in many possible emergencies that Kate fancied, but there was as much about the children's characteristics as if I, who had them in charge for the time being, was either blind or abnormally stupid.

It seemed to me that I already knew all that could be learned about them, for, though they were my nieces, were they not mere children?—intelligent and affectionate, but, thank heaven, entirely honest, innocent, and transparent? Woman though I was, and very proud, too, of my new dignity, my own dolls and other playthings had been laid away only four or five years, and my recollection of

earlier days, almost all the way back to babyhood, were still vivid, so no matter what either of the little dears might do or say, I could quickly "put myself in her place."

But "Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh," so dear Kate couldn't have withheld any of her instructions and cautions and other heart-throbs about her darlings—not even had she been writing to a mother-angel from heaven, instead of to an ordinary flesh-and-blood sister with only three or four years of long dresses to her credit. Of course, my own letters were as full of the children as Kate's, partly because I had little else to write of, but also that the absent mother might know of all the daily doings of her darlings. Fortunately there was nothing unpleasant to report, nothing to conceal. For the rest, I was enjoying my first unrestricted revel with two little girls,—the younger children in our family at home were all boys—and I was so happy in it that my heart overflowed on many pages to Kate and to my mother.

One of my longest letters home was about a trip to an excursionists' resort, a few miles from the city—a resort which Mrs. Lyle said

was entirely a safe one to which a young woman might take two children, and of which the Tiger said:

"It's dandy! Mamma's took us dere lots, an' papa, too, humtimes. Dere's lions dere, an' hoda water, an' el'phants, an' donkey-tarriages, an' tandy, an' boats, an' all tynds of tats."

"Dwate bid tats!" added the Insect, extending her chubby hands as far apart as possible. "As bid as, oh,"—here the hands dropped helplessly,—"as bid as you is!"

"Incie, dear, I fear you've been using magnifying glasses."

"Didn't never wear no maddenfire dlasses, nor no uvver tynd, eiver, 'cep' when dwatedwan'pa put his dlasses on me, hoe I tood play dwan'ma."

We made the trip by boat, which took us through the East River, where I saw many of New York's wonders. At first I longed for a guidebook, but the children, who seemed familiar with the route, volunteered so much information regarding objects of interest that I was instructed as well as amused.

"Dat's de Batt'ry," said the Tiger, as we

passed a park at the southern tip of the city, " an' dat funny wound bwown house on it used to be a fort, to shoot people from—hee de 'quare holes where de cannons used to tum fwue? Now it's a 'twarium—a house full of fishes, an' each tynd of fish lives in a baff-tub all its own, an' tan wiggle about all it likes wivout bein' told not to 'plash water on de floor. Dey don't have to be wiped off wiv towels, eiver, an' made to be tareful dat dey don't tatch told.

" Hee dat fing like a big fence hung acwoss de wivver? Dat's Bwooklyn Bwidge. It don't look very big now, but when you det tlose to it, it's awful. You want to hyut your eyes, 'tause you'll be 'fraid it'll fall down an' hit you.

" Oh, hee dat place where a fewwy-boat's tummin' out, djust dis hide o' de bwidge? Well, dat's where Gen'ral Washin'ton bwought his soldiers down to, after dey dot beat in a big battle out on Long Island, an' had to hurry over to New York, an' dere wasn't any bwidge den, nor 'team fewwy-boats, neiver, nor —ugh!—we's doein' under de bwidge! Hyut your eyes, Incie, an' help me hay—

"'Bwidgie, bwidgie, don't fall down,
Or I'll waise a howl dat'll wouse de town.'"

The children repeated this rhyme several times in a matter-of-fact way, and with closed eyes; then, as if there had been no interruption, the Tiger continued:

"Hee dat big yellow house, up dere past de bwidge, on de Bwooklyn hide? Well, de navy yard's behind dat, hoe lets look for battle-hyips, an' twoozers, an' dun boats an' torpeedy boats. Ain't it funny dat dwate big 'trong fings like dem boats has to be doctored humtimes, djust like little dirls? Well, dey do; Papa hays dat's what dey tums to navy-yards for."

"Mebbe dey eats humfin' dat disagwees wiv 'em, when dey's hailin' wound," suggested the Insect; "hyarks, or whales, or hee-lions, or humfin'. I haw one of 'em bein' doctored, one day after papa told us 'bout de hyips bein' hick, an' de hyip opened its fwont part djust like a mouf, an' a doctor as bid as de tuck-up-part of a church divved it hum med'cine wiv a 'poon, an'——"

"Incie!" I exclaimed severely, to end this impossible story. As I spoke the Tiger whispered at my ear:

"Hyee djeamed it—don't you hee?" Then she said aloud, "Incie dear, what did de hick hyip do den?"

"Oh, it kwyed, an' hed it wanted hum tandy to take de bad taste out of its mouf. An' de doctor dave it hum mosh-mallows. An' den I wished I was hick too!"

"Phew!" exclaimed the Tiger soon after the story ended, and we were passing a great lot of ugly looking buildings on the Brooklyn side, "do you know what dey make in dem fact'ries? Dey make all tynds of bad hmells. An' you hee dat dwate bid house on de island, wiv little windows all over it? You know what dat is? Dat's a pwison, where dey puts bad peoples."

"I wish," said I, with my handkerchief at my nose, "that they'd put the smell-makers there."

"Hoe do I, an' mamma hays dey'd do it if papa tood be mayor a while. But dere's humfin badder tummin'. You hee dat place up dere where de wivver turns 'wound de torner? Well, dat's de door of de bad place—anyhow, people hays hoe."

"What on earth do you mean, Tiggie?"

"Djust what I hay. De name of it is Hell Date. But Nowah hays dat dere's hum mistake 'bout it, 'tause dere ain't no water all 'wound de door of de bad place, else it would det inside when de door was open, an' put out de fire. An' I dess Nowah knows, 't'ause hyee's djedful weligious an' does to church ev'ry Hunday."

After passing Hell Gate the boat entered a stretch of water that delighted my eyes, so unaccustomed from youth to scenes in which water was prominent. Little coves and capes were on either shore, and bold hills in the distance, and I began to "snap" a pocket-camera at different bits of scenery.

"What you doein' to do wiv dem pittchers, Auntie Nell?" asked the Insect.

"Take them back home—out West, dear, to remind me of what I've seen, and to show my parents and brothers."

"Boo—hoo—hoo!" exclaimed the Tiger.

"What have you done to yourself dear?—what's happened to you?" I asked quickly.

"Noffin',—boo-hoo—hoo!" was the reply, as the child sat motionless, with tears streaming down her cheeks.

"I wants to kwy too," said the Insect, digging her little fists into her eyes, "But I tan't."

"Why should either of you cry?" I asked, taking the Insect into my lap.

"It's 'bout dat bid house over dere." As she spoke, the Insect extended her hand toward a great brick building—the largest single building I ever saw.

"You know what dat is?" asked the Tiger, her eyes eloquent with sadness. "Dat's a hylum, an' dere's hundreds an' fousan's of children dere dat ain't dot any papas an' mammas. It always makes me kwy to fink 'bout 'em."

"I used to kwy 'bout 'em too," said the Insect, "till I went over dere an' haw all de children out on de gwass a-playin', an' each one of 'em had a papa-an'-mamma angel wiv 'em, djust like mamma hed hyee 'pected dere was. De children didn't hee 'em, but I did. An' de papa-an'-mamma angels tep' de children from lots of hurts, 'cept dey was bound to det into twouble anyhow."

I suppose I manifested surprise at this unexpected statement, for the Tiger made haste to wipe her tear-stained face on my cheek and to whisper:

"Dat's anuvver of de Insec's djeams. I wish I'd djeamed it too, so I could have a pittcher of it in my eyes." And the Tiger's eyes flowed afresh. I tried to comfort her, and I said to her sister:

"Incie, if you saw the children with angels about them, why should you wish to cry?"

"'Tause," was the reply, as the Insect again endeavored to squeeze some moisture from her eyes, "'tause Tiggie's kwyin'. I likes to do de hame fings Tiggie does."

At the rail of the boat sat a very stout German who had fallen asleep and whose head was rolling in a manner that would have amused me but for my niece's sorrow. He was directly in the line of the Tiger's tearful gaze at the asylum, but the child did not seem to see him. Suddenly while the new flow of tears was at its flood, and no effort of mine could stay it, the German's hat tumbled off and struck the deck with a hollow sound, and the German woke with a face full of surprise, and the Tiger laughed so heartily and so persistently through her tears that I had to hide her face, and beg her to control herself. Before she succeeded, the asylum had been

passed, and she and the Insect were tickling one another as merrily as if there were not an orphan or a sorrow in the world.

"Now, Auntie Nell," said the Tiger, as the boat approached its dock, "dis is 'bout de time o' de twip when we always has to hettle de twestion: Is we doin' to have hoda-water an' tandy on de way to de animals, or on de way back?"

"Very well, dear. It shall be either way you wish."

"Dat's what mamma always hays, but the twubble is to d'cide. I like to have 'em first, but I like to 'ticipate 'em too."

"Suppose we let the little sister decide. Incie, dear, which shall it be?—before or after?"

The precious eyes grew large and filled with longing and the sweet little mouth replied:

"Bofe!"

"Hyee always hays dat," said the Tiger, "but"—here she sighed—"mamma finks to have 'em one way is enough. Hyee finks two helpin's of hoda-water an' tandy is bad for our d'jestions, hoe I 'pose we ought to fink hoe too, but we don't like to."

As they devoured with their eyes the entire confectioner's shop at the head of the pier, I filled their mouths also. Then they led me to several mechanical swings, where I treated them to some moments of bliss. We went on to a pool in which large sea-lions sported and grunted, and dived for fish thrown by their keeper ; I could have stared at them for hours, but the children, one at either side, soon tugged me away, toward a circular path on which donkeys drew little carriages. I took the hint, and soon my nieces were looking so happy that I gladly paid for successive rides until the Tiger exclaimed :

" Now for the monkeys an' tats ! "

Soon we were at the monkey-cages and the children were in ecstacies, though the animals affected me unpleasantly—they were too suggestive of some people whom I disliked. 'Twas a great relief to be introduced to the elephants—the first I had ever seen ; I soon lost myself in contemplation of their immensity, and homeliness, and imperturbability. But the Tiger tugged at my hand and said :

" We don't like el'phants. Dey don't look as if dey'd like to be petted. Let's doe hee de tats ! "

"De dwate bid tats!" added the Insect.

"In a moment, dears," I replied. "Auntie Nell never saw elephants before."

"Do you know what I fink?" said the Tiger. "I fink dat biggest el'phant acts djust like Mr. 'Twyver when he tums a-visitin'."

I turned so abruptly as to snatch both children from their feet and I asked:

"Where are the cats?"

I was hurried to a row of great outdoor cages, in which were panthers, tigers, leopards, pumas, lynxes, lions, etc., most of which were pacing their floors as industriously as if hoping to wear holes in the boards, through which they might escape. The children greeted these terrible beasts as if they were old acquaintances, and they addressed each by a human name, though no such names were affixed to the cages—Mrs. Brown, Mr. Dean, Miss Rollins, Major Perk, Dr. Trimmer, etc. They talked to the great brutes and expressed opinions of them and asked them questions, and apparently imagined answers, for the chatter was incessant, and it seemed to me that some of the animals manifested interest in the speakers—probably a longing to eat the little dears, which

was so comprehensible to me that I couldn't blame the poor creatures, though I instinctively held the children so close to me that the Insect squealed :

"Ow! You's hurtin' me!"

But there was one animal—a lion with a noble face and magnificent mane, to whom the children did not speak and who did not look at any of us. He stood as motionless as a bronze figure and stared fixedly at—nothing, apparently. He did not seem expectant, for his eyes, though not dull, had the resigned look that I had seen in the eyes of some old "prospectors," out in our mining country, whose golden chances had slipped through their fingers and who my father said were always looking backward instead of forward. How long we might have gazed at him I do not know, for an impish boy, who approached us slyly, flung a pebble which struck a bar of the cage sharply and the bronze figure changed quickly to a brute so angry that he frightened us away. The Tiger—Kate's Tiger—sighed and said :

"Poor ol' lion! You know what he was finkin' 'bout?—he does it lots of times. He's

finking 'bout de time when he was a little boy lion, an' lived in de woods, an' could wun about as much as he liked. Dat's what papa finks, an' I fink hoe too, 'tause I tan hee it in his eyes. When papa dets witch, an' divs Incie an' me a lot o' money, we's doein' to buy dat lion, an' buy a 'teamboat, an' put de lion in it, an' take him over to Affiker, where he tum fwom, an' let him loose, to find his home an' fam'ly."

"I heen him wiv his fam'ly, one time," said Insect. "He an' de mamma-lion an' de little lion was doein' to de market, wiv' a basket, to buy hum meat for dinner, an' he looked as happy as papa does when Hunday tums. But—" and the Insect's voice grew plaintive, "I tan't hee what he tummed back here for."

The Tiger squeezed my hand and pulled it till I looked down inquiringly; then she whispered:

"Djeam!"

We returned to the city by an early boat, for Norah had told me that Kate usually planned to have the Insect get her afternoon nap in the cabin. When the blessed dreamer got fairly into Napland, with the sister and me on guard near by, I said:

"Tiggie! After all the talk about big cats, you children forgot to show them to me!"

The Tiger looked astonished and almost contemptuous as she replied:

"Why, you heen 'em all!—de tigers an' lions an' panfers an' leopards an' fings. Didn't you know all dem wasn't nuffiin' but big tats?"

"Ah! I—see. But where did you get their names—Mrs. Brown and Doctor——"

"Oh, we divved dem to 'em ourselves, 'tause dey 'minds us of peoples we know. Papa an' mamma hays ev'rybody 'minds 'em of hum tynd of animal or bird or fish or humfin', an' it's de hame way wiv Incie an' me. I never knew who the el'phants looked like till to-day, but didn't dat biggest one look djust like Mr. 'Twyver when he tums a-visitin' an' 'tands up as if he didn't know how to hit down?"

CHAPTER XI

"Playin' Hoss"

My days soon came to have a routine as unvarying as the round of the clock. Immediately after breakfast the children and Kate's bicycle accompanied me to Riverside Drive, where I always found Mrs. Lyle and Mr. Stryver awaiting me, and under their tuition I soon became so efficient that little or no assistance was necessary. From the gentle slopes of the bicycle path I graduated to the sharper decline and ascent around Grant's tomb; I learned to turn in space so small that Mr. Stryver, borrowing a technical phrase from the navy, said my "tactical diameter" was ten feet, scant, which would enable me to practice in Kate's little parlor when a rainy day should come.

The children—bless them!—never made me the least trouble while we were at the Drive. Instead of doing dreadful things, such as my experiences with my little brothers would

have led me to expect from boys, they remained wherever I placed them, whether on a bench, or leaning against the wall, or near the mothers and nurses who had wheeled babies over in carriages to sit in the shade of the trees and breathe the fresh, pure air that came from the other side of the river. Boys would have chased the few carriages and automobiles that appeared in the roadways, or thrown pebbles at the equestrians who came through the bridle path, but the Tiger and the Insect were never venturesome. Mrs. Lyle said she never saw better children, and as she had little girls of her own I thought the compliment great enough to repeat by letter to Kate, but the dear bundle of conceit replied:

"How could she help it? Her children have inherited some fine blood from their mother, but their father—why, he and Harry are not to be mentioned in the same day—week—month—year, though Mr. Lyle is far better than men in general."

Even Mr. Stryver seemed to find my nieces interesting. This astonished me, for I had seldom or never met young men who did not regard all children as nuisances. But Mr.

Stryver frequently chatted with Tiggie and Incie, while his sister and I rode up and down the path together, and he said some nice things about them, which I never failed to repeat in my letters to Kate, for it had been evident, ever since she left home, that her darlings were always in her mind. I refrained, however, from repeating the shocking discovery that Mr. Stryver was slyly and patiently teaching the children to utter distinctly certain sounds which they ignored in conversation; in short, he was preparing them to speak plainly. I would not have regretted the change, for my own sake, for, as "evil communications corrupt good manners" I had several times found myself conforming my "r's" and "g's" and other consonants to the children's system of pronunciation and I knew that if perchance I carried any such jargon back home with me I would never hear the end of it.

"I can't for the life of me understand, my dear," said Mrs. Lyle to me one morning, while we were resting by our wheels, "how you keep the children so clean. When my little girls come over here, I see to it that

they're in brown frocks and stockings and shoes—everything as near dirt color as possible. They do nothing dreadful, but somehow they rub against the wall, and put their arms around the trees, and lean over my bicycle-tires, and pick up bits of stone, until they would look like guttersnipes if they had come out all in white, like Tiggie and Incie this morning."

"Give Kate the entire credit," I replied. "I've not attempted to teach them anything, for they've made me no trouble. They play on the floor at home, and have to be washed frequently, and they find dirt in the park in front of the house, and frequently tear their clothes, but they really seem to have some care for their appearance, when they're in white."

As we talked, the children stood on the grass, perhaps two hundred feet from us, between the bicycle-path and the saddle-path; hand in hand and all in white, gazing upward, probably at a bird in the trees; they looked like a pair of angels, newly arrived and wondering if they had not better return. An equestrian rode past them at the gallop—an

The Tiger dug her toes into the earth and kicked rapidly towards her sister.

unusual gait with New Yorkers, most of whom ride at the trot, as if their sole purpose was to look as awkward and unhorsemanlike as possible. As the saddle-path was of soft earth that a night shower had made moist, the horse's feet threw small masses of dirt backward, and the spectacle reminded me so strongly of home that my eyes followed the rider as he passed up the road, until my attention was arrested by a commanding shout of "Children!" from Mr. Stryver, and by Mrs. Lyle exclaiming:

"Miss Trewsome!—my dear!—do look at your nieces!"

I turned my head and saw the children standing side by side in the saddle-path and pawing the earth as if in imitation of the horse. Suddenly they stopped and began talking to one another: then the Insect stepped two or three paces backward, and the Tiger dug her toes into the earth and kicked rapidly towards her sister, a lot of dirt responding to each kick. The Insect followed the Tiger's example, and quickly there was in progress a veritable dirt-fight, accompanied by shouts of "I's a hoss!" "Do it hum more!" "Do it faster!" and similar cries.

I flew to the rescue of their clothes and eyes, but before I reached the scene of conflict a kick that was a trifle too vigorous had deprived the Tiger of her footing, and down she fell, at full length into the dirt. Instantly the Insect seated herself upon the fallen figure and squealed:

"I's beat you! Hooway!"

A wriggle of the Tiger unseated her conqueror, who rolled over and fell—face downward, of course, and there arose a compound yell and when I picked them up two disgracefully dirty children were crying bitterly, and sputtering bits of earth from their mouths and wiping their eyes with dirty hands.

"You abominable little wretches!" I exclaimed. "What do you mean by such conduct—and while Auntie Nell was trusting you, too! I shall write your mother all about it."

"Be tareful to tell her dat I beated Tiggie," said the Insect. "An' 'twas larks! Hooway! I beated!"

"Tiggie, how did you come to do such a dreadful thing?"

"Why, you hee, de man's horse frew dirt wiv his foots, an' we touldn't unner'tan how he

done it, hoe we twied to find out. An' we toodn't hee behind us, to know if we was doin' it, hoe we turned wound, an' den our foots began to fwoe de dirt at each uvver, like we done in de hnow in de winter—we had drate hnow fights dat way last winter."

"But didn't you see that you were kicking dirt on each other's clean white clothes?"

"Ye—es."

"Then why didn't you stop?"

"Why—'tause—why, I dess—why, when you bedins fightin', even if it's only for fun, you don't 'zackly know how to 'top—don't you know?"

I did; but in the circumstances I was not inclined to admit it while looking at the children's blotched and spotted frocks and streaked and smeared faces.

"But, children! What do you suppose Mrs. Lyle and her brother will think? and what will the people we meet on the way home think, when they see you?"

The Insect cast a timid, inquiring look at the Tiger, who cast it back to the Insect, two dirty little faces twitched forth broad smiles, the Insect looked fearlessly at me and replied:

"I dess dey'll fink we's been havin' fun."

"Cartloads of fun!" added the Tiger.

I quickly found myself wondering how I could get my disgraces home unseen and hide them in the bathroom; while I wondered, Mrs. Lyle and her brother approached, both smiling as pleasantly as if nothing unusual had occurred.

"Children," said Mr. Stryver, "perhaps your aunt will let me take you up to the drinking fountain at the head of the bicycle-path. I shouldn't wonder if your faces would look better afterward."

"Oh, Mr. Stryver,"—I began, but Mrs. Lyle whispered:

"Better he than you. Men don't mind dirt. Besides, he's had some experience with his own nieces."

I protested no longer. Mrs. Lyle said:

"Don't look so distressed, my dear. One would suppose you'd never seen children let themselves loose before."

"I've had my sorrows with boys," I replied; "but I never imagined that two little girls, like——"

"Dear me! Were you and Kate brought up

in a convent?—or in a band-box? I was a thorough tomboy when I was little, and I can't say that I regret it."

I laughed, for I began to recall some of the dreadful things that Kate and I had done in our short-frock days. I confessed that we had climbed trees, and made clay images, and played at gold-mining all over our back yard, digging pits deep enough to hide us and make our clothes almost unfit for self-respecting wash-tubs, but—we had never indulged in a dirt fight on a public highway, and in white clothes. Had our mother ever been obliged to lead us homeward, in such a plight as my nieces, and through a mile of streets and park-paths, with as many people to meet as always are abroad in New York by daylight, no matter what the hour, she would——

"She wouldn't specially care, unless she chanced to know the people," said Mrs. Lyle, in a strain of philosophy which seems to be quite comforting to city people. "Besides, I do believe that Wayne—but never mind; don't worry any more about the children until you must. We bicyclists have some devices for making the best of stained clothing. When

Wayne is done with the children, I'll take them in hand. But oh, if you'd brought your camera! What a picture you might have got of your nieces to show their mother—after her return!"

Gradually the cheery little woman forced me to forget the humiliating homeward trip I was expecting, and she and I rode slowly to the foot of the path and back, stopping *en route* to gaze at some houses which I greatly admired. On our return my nieces arose from a bench on which they were sitting with Mr. Stryver and the Tiger asked:

"What do you fink of us now?"

Their cleanly appearance puzzled me, until I took them in hand, when I discovered that over the front of each little frock white handkerchiefs had been neatly draped to hide the dirty garments.

"Mr. Stryver! I couldn't have believed it possible! But where did you get so many handkerchiefs?—and so many dozens of pins?"

"I hadn't far to go for them," was the reply, "for bicyclists—long-distance riders, soon learn by experience that 'tis impossible

to carry too many handkerchiefs—or pins, for accidents will occur, to men."

"But how did you know what to do?—and how to do it?"

The young man looked quizzically at his sister, who laughed and said:

"He's taken my children fishing and nutting, and after pond-lilies and frog-spawn, and goodness only knows what else, and he's heard from me when he's brought them home in a disgraceful condition. Really, your nieces look far better than they did, don't you think so?—not quite the thing for a lawn party in the suburbs, but——"

"But quite neat enough to be taken home without attracting attention," said I, "and I never can thank Mr. Stryver enough."

"Please don't mention it," said the young man. "If you'll permit, I'll guide you through streets where houses and people are fewest; in your own park you'll meet scarcely any one at this hour."

So we all returned together, meeting almost no one. I forgot the accident and the children seemed entirely willing to overlook all that had occurred.

CHAPTER XII

A Day of Mythology

On returning from the bicycle-path it was my custom to write a long letter to Kate, in which I enclosed whatever the children might pen or pencil or indite. But it was not always easy to obtain such enclosures, for the children had their own special household duties, the principal of which was the care of their dolls. These counterfeit infants had corners of the nursery set apart for their accommodation, and they had beds and bureaus and chairs of their own, as well as wardrobes, and as all the dolls had to be dressed in the morning, and undressed and nightgowned at night, they required much of the children's time.

"Dey's djust like little dirls," said the Tiger one morning, when I asked if her children did not sometimes become tiresome. "Hum of 'em's as dood as pie, an' hum uvvers is as bad as—oh, as bad as med'cine, an' a lot of 'em's so diff'rent dat you tan't tell what

dey's doein' to do next. You'd fink dis one" (here she held up a porcelain-faced doll) "ought to be de doodest of de whole lot, for hyee's dot weal hair, an' hyee tan open an' hyut her eyes, an' her mouf's dot an inside to it, djust like peoples. But hyee's djust a pwoud, 'tuck-up fing; hyee won't bend herself, hoe's to hit in a chair. We dave her milk from a 'poon one day, 'tause her mouf looked as if humfin' ought to be put in it, an' two or free days after dat, when I asked papa to tiss her dood-night, he hed he dessed hyee hadn't used her toof-bwush lately. Den he dave her hum med'cine—he hed it was a dissyfectan', an' after dat, mamma had to div her hum tologne, to hide de dissyfectan', but noffin' heemed to make her all nice again. Papa finks noffin' will fix her 'cept two or free hours in de titchen 'tove. Hyee's an awful twoublesome baby."

"If I were you," said I, as the doll was swung to and fro in front of me and exhaled a composite odor—stale milk, carbolic acid, and cologne, "I would stop making believe that such a doll is a baby."

"Would you? Well I dess you wouldn't,

if you was me. 'Tause if you 'top makin' b'lieve wiv one of 'em, you might do it 'bout all of 'em, an' den dere wouldn't be any more fun—don't you hee? If you's doein' to have any fun makin' b'lieve, you mus' 'tick to de makin' b'lieve; dat's what papa hays. Hurry up, Incie; is your children all dwessed? If dey is, it's time to tell 'em 'tories. I fink it's 'bout time for a miffology 'tory, don't you?"

"All wight. You tell it to 'em, an' I'll make b'lieve I's a dollie too."

"What on earth do you children know of mythology?" I asked.

"Well, we know all papa an' mamma's told us out of de bid fat book—you know de bid fat book, don't you?"

"I must confess that I don't—not if that is the name of it."

Both children looked at me so pityingly that I felt myself quite uncomfortable and blushing for shame as the Tiger dragged from the bookcase a dictionary of mythology. But I said:

"Let me be a dollie, too, so I can listen."

"All wight. Once dere was an ol' djentleman named Philemon an' he had a wife, an' her

naine was Bosses—but not de tynd of bosses dere is now. An' dey was awful poor, an' dey lived in a house wiv only one room in it, an' it was way out on de edge of de town. An' one day two dods—de tynd dat peoples used to b'lieve in 'fore dey had any of de wight tynd of pweachers—two dods tame down from de heaven dey lived in. An' dey dot tired an' hungry, 'tause dey wasn't used to walkin'—hoe dey walked into de town an' asked de people for humfin' to eat. An' hum of de people fought dey was fieves, an' uvver people fought dey was twamps, an' a lot of de people was mean anyhow, so de poor dods wish dey'd 'tayed home, where dey had nectar an' ambwosie an' all tynds of nice fings bwought to 'em whenever dey felt empty.

"Hoe de dods took to de woods, to teep from being took up by de p'leece, an' all of a hudden dey heen de little house where Philemon an' Bosses lived, an' no dogs tame out to bark at 'em, hoe dey asked if dere wasn't hum told vittles to div away. An' Philemon an' Bosses was hoe poor dat dey hadn't only 'nuff for one meal for demselves an' dey didn't know where any more was to tum from; papa hays

he desses Philemon was out of a djob, an' Mrs. Bosses touldn't det any washin' or scrubbin' to do, an' dere wasn't any 'Nited Charities to doe to. But dey was dood people all-a-hame, hoe dey told de dods dat dey didn't have much, but dey'd doe halves wiv 'em. Hoe dey bwought out ev'ryfin' in de house—hum bwead, an' milk, an' gwapes, an' dey all began to eat, an' de more dey ate de more dere was on de table to eat, an' de milk-pitcher never dot empty, like ours does—'twas djust like de loaves an' fishes in de Bible 'tory. An' den de dods went away, an' always after dat Philemon an' Bosses had plenty to eat in de house wivout buyin' it. Dey toodn't buy anyfin' if dey wanted to, 'tause next time dey went to de town dere wasn't no town at all—nuffin' but a lake, an' all de people was turned to fishes—doe I don't fink dat was much punishment for 'em, for fishes tan play any way dey like wivout havin' to be 'fraid dey'll det deir tloses dirty. Anyhow, dat's de way it was."

"De bigges' doll would like anuvver miffology 'tory," said I, quite unconscious of how I was saying it, but the Insect shouted,

"Hooway!" and kissed me and the Tiger exclaimed:

"Dat hounded djust like mamma! Oh, ain't you dee!" Then she and her sister chuckled, and tickled each other, which was their customary manner of expressing extreme hilarity. When I reminded them that the biggest doll was an impatient creature and ought to be humored there was another outburst, but soon the Tiger said:

"Well, I dess I'll tell you 'bout Midas. He was a ting—dat's humfin' like Pres'dent of de 'Nited 'Tates, doe papa hays Midas was more like a pres'dent of a twust tumpany, whatever dat is. An' he didn't tare for nuffin' but to det money—dold money, an' he dot lots of it, an' de more he dot de more he wanted. One day he hed he wished ev'ryfing he touched would turn to dold. An' up popped a fairy an' hed, 'Do you weally wish dat, hones' an' twuly?' An' Midas hed, 'You bet!' Hoe de fairy hed, 'Doe on a-touchin'.'

"Hoe Midas touched de table, an' wight away it turned to dold, an' hoe did de table-cloff; an' de dishes an' knives an' forks an' 'poons would have done it too if dey hadn't

been dold already. He went wound de woom touchin' fings—de chairs an' books an' mag'-zines an' paper-tutters an' visitin'-tards an' lamps, an' ev'ryfing turned to dold, an' Nowah hays hyee's dlad hyee didn't have to do de work in dat house, 'tause 'twould take lots of wubbin' to keep hoe many dold fings bwight.

"When Midas dot in his darden he went to his fav'rite wose-bush to take a dood long hmell, but de minute his nose touched de wose it turned it to dold, an' it wasn't hmelly no more. Hoe Midas finked dere was humtimes too much of a dood fing, like I found out on my birfday, when I ate up a whole box of tandy an' touldn't eat noffin' but med'cine next day. 'Bout dat time Midas dot hungry, hoe he went into de dinin'-room an' wang de titchen bell an' tol' de dirl to bring him humfin' to eat. But de oatmeal, an' meat, an' potatoes an' puddin' turned to dold as hoon as he touched 'em, an' dey hurted his toofs like as if he'd bited a bone. Hoe he took a dwink of wine—but he didn't, 'tause de wine turned to dold as hoon as his mouf touched it. Den he hed 'Doodness dracious' or 'Ton—found it!' or humfin'."

"I hood fink he would," said the Insect. "If my dinner was to do dat way, I'd kwy, an' ask mamma to make 'em 'top doin' it."

"Well," continued the Tiger, "dat wasn't de worst dat happened. He had a little dirl, an' he loved her lots, an' he haw her tummin' into de dinin'-woom—I 'pose she was late, like little dirls usually is. An' wight away he fordot about his hungry, an' his dold, an' didn't fink of anyfing but divvin' his little dirl a tiss; besides, hyee was unhappy, an' kwyin', 'tause hyee'd been into de darden to det hum woses, an' found 'em all turned to dold. But hyee hmiled when hyee haw her papa, an' wan up to him, but—what do you fink? Why, as hoon as he tissed her, hyee all turned to dold too. Why, de tears on her cheeks 'topped bein' water an' turned to dold, an hoe did her hmile, doe how a hmile tood turn to dold is humfin' I tan't unnertan'. I's twied lots to det a pittcher of it in my eyes, but I tan't.

"'Bout dat time Midas changed his mind an' he made an awful fuss 'bout it. An' de fairy tame back again, an' Midas talled himself all tynds of bad names, till de fairy dot horry for him, an' told him to doe to a bwook in de

darden, an' det hum of de water, an' whatever he'd spwinkle wiv it would doe back an' be de way it was. Hoe he twotted down to de bwook an' dot hum of de water, an' frew hum on his little dirl, an' hyee 'topped bein' dold, an' de hmile undolded itself, an' de dold kwy on her face dot to be water again, an' he tissed it away an' he hugged her lots, an' he was hensible after dat."

"An' den," added the Insect, "he 'plashed hum of de water on de fings on de table, an' dey all dot dood to eat aden, an' Midas an' de little dirl djust pigged 'em, 'tause dey'd had to wait hoe long dat dey was awful hungry. An' it makes me awful hungry to fink 'bout 'em, hoe I wish it would be lunchtime awful twick."

CHAPTER XIII

Sunday

THERE came a morning when my last doze was not disturbed by New York's chorus of seven-o'clock whistles, nor ended by Norah with the familiar remark, "Letters for you, Miss." The first sounds I heard were musical; a high, light soprano and a deep, strong contralto were singing:

"I fink when I wead dat hweet 'tory of old,
When Djesus was here among men;
How He talled little children like lambs to His fold;
I hood like to have been wiv Him den."

and other songs which reminded me that Sunday had come. After each song I heard footfalls in the hallway and whisperings outside my door, but I did not respond, for the songs took me back to the days when Kate and I were children, and sang the very same lines.

But when they sang:

"Djesus loves me—dat I know
For de Bible tells me hoe.
He will take away my hin—
Let His little child tum in——"

I sprang from my bed and hurried to the nursery. Take away their "sin," indeed! I was as orthodox as any one who had always gone to church and believed all that was said there, but that Kate's innocents—my own dear little angels—had any "sin" seemed too ridiculous to be endurable.

"Hooray!" shouted the Tiger, as I appeared in the doorway. "We's been waitin' for you as dood as we tood, but 'twas awful hard, doe we had twackers to help us. Papa an' mamma always lets us help ourselves at de twacker-box Hunday mornin's, hoe we won't det too hungry 'fore Nowah dets back from church an' makes bweakfas' weddy. An' papa always tells us a Hunday 'tory 'fore we dets up, hoe we want you to play papa for us, like you's been playin' mamma. We's wanted you to play papa lots of times before, but we didn't fink 'twould be tynd to make you make b'lieve you was two people at a time, 'tause it takes all papa an' mamma togevver tan do to teep us doein'."

"Tell us nice Hunday 'tory—twick!" said the Insect, climbing out of her crib and into my lap, where she was joined by the Tiger, who said:

"Now we's weddy. Doe on."

The children looked so angelic, with their pure, sweet faces and white raiment, that I bethought me at once of a story which had comforted me greatly in the days when I was sometimes called a bad little girl, so I began:

"Once when Jesus was talking to the people, some mothers brought their little children to Him, and asked Him to put His hands on them and pray for some good to come to them. This was the custom in that country and among the Jews; people always wanted to be prayed for and blessed by very good men, and the mothers of these little children believed that Jesus was a teacher sent from God. But some of the disciples of Jesus—His friends and helpers, who went about with Him, scolded the mothers and told them not to trouble Jesus. I suppose they thought grown people, some of whom were very bad, needed prayers and blessings more than little children."

"I dess dem fwends of Djesus didn't have no little dirls of deir own," said the Tiger, "else dey wouldn't have twied to make de mammas 'top."

"Perhaps you are right, dear. But Jesus told them to let the little children come to Him, and not to keep them away from Him, for of such was the kingdom of heaven. I suppose He meant that all the angels were innocent and loving, like good little children. So He placed His hands on their heads and blessed them, and made their mammas very happy."

"Heaven ain't much like New York 'partment houses, Auntie Nell, is it?"

"I hope, dear, that 'tis like this part of this house at this very minute. But why do you ask?"

"'Tause. Dere's lots of 'partment houses dat won't let little children live in 'em at all. Dere was one 'partment dat papa an' mamma wanted ever hoe much, but de djan'tor asked 'em if dey had any children, an' dey told him dey had, an' he hed he toodn't hire de 'partment to 'em. An' mamma tame home an' dwessed Incie an' me in our Hunday tloses an' took us to dat house an' hyow'd us to de djan'tor, an' told him dat he tood hee dat we wasn't like uvver folks' children. An' de djan'tor laughed, an' made de funniest, meanest face—

well, I wish you tood have heen it; I won't fordet it as long as I live. An' mamma kwyed all de way home, an' I djust made a paper-doll of dat djan'tor, an' Incie an' me 'tuck pins in him all day long—de mean ol' fing! An' when mamma told papa 'bout it he talled her a hilly dirl, an' den he hed he'd like to div dat djan'tor a blessin', but he didn't look as if he meant it. I don't b'lieve dat djan'tor'll doe to heaven; do you?"

"I hope so, dear, if only to learn what a mistake he made."

"But he tan't be a djan'tor up dere, tan he? 'Tause I asked papa once if dere was 'partment houses in heaven, an' he hed, 'No, an' if dere's any in de uvver place I'm horry for de wicked. But de builders of hum of 'em'll be dere, I fink. An' I wish Nowah would tum home from church, 'tause twackers ain't awful fillin'."

After breakfast the children led me to the parlor and together climbed into a large chair; the Tiger placed an arm around the Insect, and the Insect clasped one of the Tiger's hands, and said:

"Now we's weddy for Hunday 'cool."

"You don't look it," I replied. "At what time does your Sunday school begin, and where?"

"Why, wite now, an' wite here. Papa or mamma always is teacher, but I dess you'll have to be it dis time. An' we always tells what de lesson's to be 'bout. An' dis time we wants it to be 'bout de pigs dat dot dwounded."

"The pigs that were drowned?"

"Yes. Don't you know? I'll fin' de place in de Bible for you."

She got out of the chair, stood on a stool, turned the leaves of a large pictorial Bible which lay on the table, and soon exclaimed:

"Dere!"

I looked, and saw a picture illustrating St. Mark's story of the destruction of the herd of swine into which evil spirits had entered.

"How do your parents teach you? Do they read the lesson, and then ask you questions about it?"

"N—o—o!" said the Tiger scornfully. "Dat's de way dey does in tommon Hunday 'cools, but ours is de dood tynd. Dey weads us de 'tory, but we does all de twestion-askin'

our own helves. Else how is we doein' to learn what we don't know?"

I was quite willing to follow the method suggested, for the requested lesson was one that had puzzled me greatly in my own Sunday school days. I had read only a few verses when the Tiger asked:

"What is an unclean 'pirit, anyway?"

"I don't know, dear; at least, not——"

"I didn't 'pose you did," sighed the Tiger, "'tause papa don't know eiver, an' of tourse you tan't be hmarter dan him. Mamma finks mebbe de poor man was mad, 'tause mad peoples is humtimes awful 'trong. When I dets mad I feels as if I tood knock de house down. But how did de unclean 'pirit, whatever it was, det into de man?"

"I don't know, dear," I replied, wishing at the same time that I had suggested a different lesson.

"Well, I dess he dot dere de hame way dat our own 'pirits did, an' nobody knows how dat was. Mamma hays it's nobody's business, eiver. Doe on."

I read on until interrupted by:

"What do you fink de bad 'pirits wanted to 'tay in dat part of de tountry for?"

"I'm sure I don't know."

"Well, I 'pected you didn't, 'tause papa don't eiver, 'less 'twas 'tause dere was lots o' mans dere dat wanted 'em, 'tause hum mans likes de tynd o' 'trong dat bad 'pirits'll div 'em —de tynd dat makes 'em do awful fings dat dood mans tan't, an' wouldn't if dey tood— fings like Tammany mans does. Doe on."

Soon again I was interrupted with:

"Do you know what made de devils want to doe into de pigs?"

Again I confessed my ignorance, and determined to search the house for a commentary before reading any more Bible stories aloud.

"Well, papa finks it was 'tause pigs was de vilest fings in sight, an' he finks de pigs djumped into de ocean so's to wash de devils out of 'em. He hays a forough baff is a dreat fing to take de devil out of peoples, even if it tills 'em, like it did de pigs. Now you fink of a dood Hunday hong for us, while we fink of anuvver lesson."

"But, Tiggie, you seem to have already had this one about the devils and the swine, and knew more about it than I could tell you, so why did you ask for it?"

"'Tause pigs is pork, an' pork disagwees wiv us, an' mamma hays it must have been a dood deal worse for little dirls dat lived in de hot tuntry where dem devil-pigs was. Hoe we likes to hear, over an' over, 'bout dem pigs bein' dwownded, 'tause den dey toodn't disagwee wiv nobody no more. An' I hope dey disagweed wiv dem devils dat dot into 'em, an' dat dey divved 'em awful tummuk-aches, to pay 'em for bovverin' dat poor man. Now what's you doin' to hing?"

I went to the piano and recalled some of the hymns on which Kate and I had been "brought up," and the children sang them as readily as if they too had been brought up on them, as I doubted not they had. When my memory had emptied itself of "Hunday hongs" I said, in self-defence:

"Suppose, now, that I be the scholar and you the teachers, and you give me some lessons? For I've not had a Sunday-school lesson in years."

"Hooray! Do you hear dat, Incie dear? Let's! What lesson do you want?"

"Oh, any one that my teachers think best for me."

"We—ll," drawled the Tiger, after rubbing her forehead, and peering through half-closed eyes into vacancy, "I 'pose you ought to have a young lady 'tory. Dere's one dat papa hays mamma needs humtimes, an' all uvver young women too, an' hyee tells him to 'doe 'long,' an' dey has lots of make-b'lieve fights 'bout it, 'pecially when mamma's doein' to have tump'ny an' is dettin' weddy for it. Dis is how it was:

"Once Djesus dwopped in at de home of a fwiend of His named Laz'rus. An' Laz'rus had two young lady histers. An' one of 'em, named Marfa, began to get up an extra nice dinner, an' take down de bes' dishes, an' wub up de hilver 'poons, an' do ev'ryfing as if 'twas a drate tump'ny affair, doe hyee knew Djesus didn't 'pect noffin' of de tynd, 'tause he was an ol' fwiend of de fam'ly. He was de bes' bein' on de earf, anyhow, hoe He didn't want anybody to take any extra twouble for Him. Why, do you know what His Hunday dinner once was? 'Twas nuffin' but wheat, wubbed out of its stalks, an' not tooked at all. It's dood, too, 'tause I's twied it humtimes, when we was in de tuntry.

"Anyhow, Marfa went on workin', an' de

uvver young lady—her name was Mawy—hyee 'tayed in de parlor an' talked to Djesus, an' listened to Him a talkin'. An' pwetty hoon Marfa dot twoss—mebbe de titchen-help was twoss, like dey djen'rally is when tump'ny tums, or mebbe de fam'ly was doin' its own work. Anyhow, Marfa tame in de parlor an' asked Djesus to tell Mawy to tum out an' do hum o' de work. An' 'twasn't very nice of her to do it dat way, an' det de tump'ny mixed up in de twarrell; hyee might have made an excuse to det Mawy out in de hall, an' asked her to 'top playin' lady long 'nuff to het de table or humfin'.

"But Djesus didn't make Mawy doe. He hed dat Marfa had too many fings on her mind—hyee was makin' too much fuss over de dinner, an' dat Mawy had done de hensible fing. 'Tause you hee, ol' fwiends would wavver have a fuss made over 'em wiv de heart, an' not wiv de hands. An' papa don't like mamma to det wore out dettin' up lunches an' dinners for her fwiends till hyee tan't div 'em de best of herself, or enjoy what's best 'bout dem. Now it's your turn, Incie; what lesson's you doein' to div Auntie Nell?"

"I dunno."

"Better fink of a young lady one. Oh, I'll tell you,—how 'bout de girl dat died an' was made alive again?"

"All wight," the Insect replied. "One time a man tum to Djesus an' wanted Him to doctor his little dirl, 'tause hyee was awful hick. An' when Djesus tame to de house de little dirl was dead. But He made her alive aden, an' den what do you fink He done?—He tol' 'em to div her humfin' to eat, doe it was 'tween meals. I dess mebbe dat was why hyee died, 'tause humtimes I det hoe hungry 'tween meals dat it heems to me dat I'll die. An' I wiss it was dinner-time now, 'tause we tan eat de hame fings as big folks at Hunday dinner, 'tause it's in de middle of de day, an' de dinner'll d'jest hours an' hours 'fore we doe to bed, hoe we don't hee awful fings when we's ahleep."

But dinner-time was still an hour or two distant, so I told many Bible stories and was obliged to answer so many puzzling questions that I thought my nieces the most intellectual prodigies alive. Yet there came a moment when the questions ended, after which the

children said nothing but what was silly, and I began to lose my patience, and exclaimed:

"Why don't you be sensible, as you were a little while ago?"

"I dess it's 'tause our bwains is wun down," said the Tiger.

"An' when people's bwains wun down," added the Insect, with dancing eyes, while she tossed her hands in air and jumped up and down, "it's time to wind up our arms an' legs. Tum on, Tiggie! Let's waise a wumpus."

They certainly did it. They raced through the hall and rooms like a lot of scared ponies, they played horse and cow and sheep and bear and dog and cat and monkey until their spirit became contagious and I joined in their frolic and was quite as hare-brained as they. I tossed them about and rolled them on the beds and I said silly things which were laughed at as if they had been brilliant jokes, and I giggled at the children's inanities till we all sank exhausted on the parlor rug, where we lay as placid as a lot of jelly-fish, till the dinner-bell roused us and I found myself possessor again of an appetite which I had begun to think I had forgotten to bring East with me.

CHAPTER XIV

Amateur Surgery

MONDAY morning brought me so many letters from Kate that I had not read them all when Mrs. Lyle and her brother came to take me wheeling on one of their favorite routes; I had passed the mere beginner's probation, they said, and they longed to have me see parts of the city which men had not yet unmade. I did not fear to leave my nieces for an hour or two, for Kate had assured me that Norah was a jewel and loved the children as dearly as if they were her own small sisters, of whom she had several. Besides, I gave my little darlings a lot of cautions, and they listened as carefully as if their dear little lives depended upon what I said to them, and the Tiger almost choked me with her adorable little arms as she said:

"We'll be as dood as pie an' peanuts an' taramels an' headcheese. We'll make b'lieve dat you's mamma, doein' out to make talls, an

us a-wantin' her to have a weal dood time an' not be worried 'bout us a bit." And the Insect said :

" I's doein' to be an angel, like I was 'fore I tame down fwom Heaven. I 'members all 'bout it."

" Hyee djeamed it," whispered the Tiger, while I covered the Insect's face with kisses and irreverently wondered whether any real angel—any baby angel, could have been sweeter.

And what a ride we had! After a mile or two of avenues and cross-streets we swept around a curve and looked down on the river, which was a hundred or more feet beneath us yet so near the base of the cliff as to threaten a soaking to whoever might fall from the side of the road. At the right was a steep hill covered with rocks and trees—not city shade-trees, but fine old forest growth.

The road was as smooth as a floor, and, better still, we had it all to ourselves; New Yorkers who own horses and carriages seem not to know of the joys of a morning ride. The grades of the road were easy, even for a beginner at wheeling, and each one led us up

to greater altitude and fresher air and larger trees, and the farther we rode the higher and bolder and more picturesque were the Palisades on the other side, while the river itself, more than a mile wide, was visible for eight or ten miles of its length, where a bend seemed to end it and transform it into a beautiful lake with shores dotted with cities and villages—a lake resembling some I had seen pictured in books, and which I longed to visit. I could not imagine why all New York people of leisure did not crowd the road and hillsides with excursion parties, and I said so, but Mr. Stryver explained :

" People with leisure and money don't appreciate it, and the people who like it haven't the time and money."

My companions showed me some old revolutionary forts and battle-grounds, and got me so excited that I expressed a wish that we might ride all day, for I was sure I would never grow tired in such air and amid such scenes.

" If you wouldn't mind a little walking over some bad quarter miles of road," said Mr. Stryver, " I think you'd enjoy a visit to the

Manor House in Van Cortlandt Park. Do you think, sister, the exertion would be too great for Miss Trewsome?"

"Exertion!" said I scornfully. "I've tramped half a day in the mountains with my father, and carried a ten-pound rifle, which is harder than pushing a wheel."

The young man looked at me wonderingly, and Mrs. Lyle exclaimed:

"Indeed she shall go to Van Cortlandt! 'Tis a grand old estate of several hundred acres, my dear, that's been turned into a park, and the Manor House is now a museum of Colonial and Revolutionary relics—furniture, and weapons, and dresses, and books, and goodness only knows what else."

So we went to Van Cortlandt, and I, who had never seen American relics of any kind, was as delighted as a child in a toy-shop, and Mr. Stryver, who was very patriotic, explained such of the contents as were of historic interest, and Mrs. Lyle explained the others, and I felt that the red-letter day of my life had come at last. It was hard to start for home, but soon we were again on the beautiful road overlooking the river and having the road and the view

all to ourselves, when we heard an appalling rattle and many toots of a horn from behind a curve.

"Get to the right of the road—quick!" said Mr. Stryver. We obeyed, for we saw approaching us an automobile—not one of the little buzzing things that sometimes ran up and down Riverside Drive, nor even one of the lumbering electric coaches that reminded me of grizzly bears, but a dreadful thing that looked like a big squatty fire-engine, and in it sat two men dressed like scarecrows and with goggles that gave their faces a demoniac expression.

As the monster passed us I heard a crash and a thud. Mrs. Lyle and I dismounted and, looking around, saw Mr. Stryver pushing his wheel off of himself and getting upon his feet.

"Merely a spill," he explained, as he looked at his bicycle. "My wheel seems to have picked up a bit of wire, which tangled itself in the spokes and stopped a pedal suddenly and threw me—and against the curbstone, too."

He started to disentangle the wire, but as he brought his left hand forward to steady the

wheel he uttered something unintelligible and looked strangely at his sister, who exclaimed:

"Wayne! What is the matter?"

"Nothing—of any consequence, but I've hurt my left arm. Won't you untwist that malicious wire for me, Sis?"

But Mrs. Lyle insisted on rubbing the injured arm, and her brother objected.

"You'll never let me do anything for you!" said Mrs. Lyle. "You self-sufficient boy."

"My dear sister," was the reply, "I'd be only too glad if you could do what my arm requires. But you can't, for to tell the truth, the arm is broken. Don't worry about it. I can easily steer the wheel home with my right hand, and the road is so smooth that there will be no jarring that will hurt me."

"You mustn't!" I said. "Broken arms are quite common in my part of the country, and men and boys say that they twinge cruelly on slight provocation until they are set. I think I can fix it so it won't trouble you on the way back."

"I beg your pardon, but—you?"

"Yes. Why not? I've seen it done. Have you a pocket-knife?"

His right hand found a large knife. Mrs. Lyle looked as if she feared I was going to attempt amputation, but I cut nothing more sensitive than a sapling near the road, which I divided into several pieces about a foot long, each of which I split, to get flat pieces. Then, thanks to a sudden inspiration, I got from the tool-bag of Kate's wheel several thick India-rubber bands, sprung one over the broken arm till it almost reached the shoulder, and another which I stopped just above the elbow. Pushing the ends of several of my improvised splints under the lower band, and drawing the upper band over the other ends, I asked:

"Can you touch the part where the break is?"

The young man turned his left hand cautiously until his lips twitched and he touched with his right hand the point of fracture.

"Now," said I, "if Mrs. Lyle will find some of the many handkerchiefs which her brother carries when bicycling——"

"Instantly, my dear,"—and soon I had tied several handkerchiefs tightly over the splints, to keep them in place, and draped the bandages with another handkerchief. When I had finished, I said:

"Now, I think he'll be all right, but he ought to see a physician when he reaches home."

"My—dear!" exclaimed Mrs. Lyle, "I didn't know that you had studied surgery."

"That wasn't surgery," I replied; "'twas merely setting a broken arm. (I did not tell her that it was my first genuine case.) My father would never let me go in the woods with him or my brother till I'd learned what to do in case of accident, so I had to play at setting broken limbs, with my little brothers for subjects."

"What a remarkable country!" exclaimed Mr. Stryver.

"That's the way to speak of it—to a native," I replied. "But how about the arm?"

Again Mr. Stryver turned his left hand cautiously and replied:

"As good as ever—apparently. There's no sensation of pain, and I suppose I shouldn't induce one. Now if you'll allow me to escort my surgeon home, and consult one who will be far less interesting——" saying which the young man mounted his wheel, steering it with one hand, while Mrs. Lyle sprinkled the air with exclamations regarding the peculiar

accomplishments of Western women, until I was obliged to tell her that in some parts of the West broken arms were almost as common as sore throats in the East. Nevertheless praise is sweet, and all of it I carried home with me had no opportunity to spoil me, for as I entered the apartment Norah greeted me with:

"Please, miss, I wish you'd write Mrs. Lintrey that she can get somebody else to do her work, for I'm goin' to leave the very day she comes home."

"Norah! What has happened?"

"What hasn't happened, miss, 'twould be easier to tell. When I'd swept the parlor I set the dustpan down a minute to answer the whistle at the dumb-waiter, an' the children emptied it out the front window an' then dropped the pan too, an' it hit a woman on the head—the bad-temperedest woman that lives in this whole flat-house, an'—"

"Apartment-house," said I, kindly but firmly, for Kate had been quite earnest in impressing me with the differing significance of the two terms, though I had not fully comprehended.

" They was hookin' jam out of the sideboard."

"Well," retorted Norah, "no matter which it is, that woman's a terror. She went to every door till she found out whose dustpan it was, an' then she gave me fits for lettin' the children play with it. As if I could be in the parlor an' the kitchen all at once! An' after I scolded 'em about it, an' they said they was sorry, what did they do but turn the water on in the bath-tub to sail boats in, an' forgot it, an' it leaked around the overflow, an' run down to the floor below, an' another woman came up to kick, an' while she was sassin' me they was hookin' jam out of the sideboard an' knockin' over some glasses that Mrs. Lintrey's very careful of, an' broke two of 'em! An' when I went at 'em about it they was that impudent—well, miss, I could have stood that, knowin' that little children don't always know the meanin' of what they say; but what does them children do but call me vile names, an' when I went to look out of the front window, to see if you wasn't comin', so you could take 'em in hand, they got potatoes out of the kitchen an' throwed 'em at me—an' some of 'em hit me, too! An' it's too much for flesh an' blood to stand any longer."

"It all seems too unnatural to believe," I murmured.

"That it does, miss, but ask the little dev—beggin' your pardon, miss, though their doin's put the word in my mouth—ask them, before me, an' see if they dare to deny a word of it."

I went in search of my nieces and found them in the nursery, apparently absorbed in their dolls, but they could not help looking askance at me, and guiltily. I was silent, for I scarcely knew how to begin. Again they glanced at me; the Tiger sullenly, and her sister as if wishing herself elsewhere.

"Children, what did you promise me when I went out?"

Suddenly the dolls required special attention.

"A-h-h!" the Tiger muttered. "You needn't holler as if you was doein' to take de woof off."

"Hateful ol' fing!" whined the Insect.

"Incie!" I tried to put a world of rebuke into my voice, and apparently I succeeded, for the Insect cried as if her heart were breaking. This was too much for the Tiger's motherly heart, so she started to comfort the Insect, but I pushed her away, and said:

"I must keep the bad sister away from the poor little thing."

The Tiger emitted a roar that thoroughly frightened me, so loud and wild was it, and she followed it with :

"Let me tomfort de Insec'. Den you tan punish me a hunderd years if you want to."

"I don't want to. But I want to know, and at once, why you've been so mischievous and meddlesome, and so naughty to Norah."

The Tiger looked as if she also wished to know, and was trying to discover, but failing.

"I dunno," she succeeded in saying. "All I can 'member 'bout it is dat we bedan—an' den we went on doin' it. We didn't want to be bad. We only wanted to do djust whatever we liked—an' we done it."

"How do you expect to undo it? You can't take back the hurt that the dustpan put on the lady's head, nor give back the jam you stole, nor——"

"Dat's hoe," the Tiger admitted, wiping her lips.

"Nor mend mamma's broken glasses, nor take back the bad words and potatoes that you——"

"Tell you what," said the Tiger frankly. "We'll doe out in de hall, an' Norah tan tall us all de bad names hyee tan fink of, an' fwoe all de potatoes in de titchen at us, an' hurt me awful. But hyee mustn't let one of dem hit de Insec', or I'll—I'll—I'll make Wome howl!'

"Tiggie!"

"You needn't hay Tiggie at me dat way, 'tause I will."

"I wants to be hurted, if Tiggie's doein' to be hurted," wailed the Insect.

Something dashed past me and snatched the Insect and kissed her, and exclaimed:

"Ye little darlin', I wouldn't hurt ye, not to save the life of me. But ye broke yer Norah's heart, that ye did. An' as for the old woman downstairs, if she says another word agin ye she'll get somethin' worse nor a dustpan on her head, that she will."

Then Norah cried, and the children watered her face with penitential tears, and I felt like telegraphing Kate to return at once, and like keeping the children under my eye until their mother came to them. Had Kate and I ever done such dreadful things? Answers came

back in humiliating profusion. Why had we done them? I was obliged to answer, like the Tiger:

"I don't know."

CHAPTER XV

A Change of Base

SOMETHING to write about, beside the children, had been so rare that I wrote Kate a long letter about Mr. Stryver's accident and of my amateur surgery. I did not spare the dear girl any of the details, for I was quite proud of my opportunity to have done something which would testify to the readiness of hand and fertility of resource which the people of the far West claim as distinctive qualities.

But alas! "pride must have a fall." While sealing the letter I remembered that my bicycling was to be a surprise to Kate on her return, so I destroyed the letter and wrote Mrs. Lyle, begging that she also would keep my secret; or, at least, that she would not, directly or indirectly, let Kate know of my share in the affair, in case it became necessary for her brother to inform Harry of his accident.

I sent the note by Norah, who returned in an hour with a reply, full of solemn promises

and containing a grateful message from Mr. Stryver, with some compliments from his surgeon, on the quality of my "First Aid To The Injured." Norah also brought, with Mr. Stryver's card, a great box of flowers so handsome that for a moment I was wicked enough to be glad of the young man's accident. Flowers were so abundant at home and so scarce in New York that I was literally hungry for them, so I buried my face in the masses of roses and heliotrope, and closed my eyes and was imagining myself at home and in our garden, when the Tiger pranced into the room and shouted :

"Nowah hays it's all fixed."

"What is, dear?"

"Why, it."

"But which 'it,' Tiggie?"

"Why, de one you hed we mustn't talk about. Don't you know?"

I did not, but I showed her the flowers and asked her if they were not lovely.

"'Deed dey is, an' you heem to love 'em, an' he loves you, an'—but I fordot dat I mustn't talk 'bout it, 'tause dat's what 'it's' about."

"Tiggie! Remember!"

"Well, I did 'member—hones' an' twuly I did. But Nowah done it—talked 'bout it, I mean. Hyee's been to Mis' Lyle's, an' Mis' Lyle's up-'tairs dirl told her dat Mr. 'Twyver's a-talkin' 'bout you all de time, an' he's awful mashed."

"Tiggie! I'm ashamed of you, and disgusted at your language. You shouldn't repeat such words when you hear them, nor should you listen to servants' tattle about anything."

"Well, how does I know what's tattle and what's twoof? 'Sides, Nowah don't tell lies, 'tause I heard mamma hay hoe. An' Nowah hed Mis' Lyles' up-'tairs dirl hed dat Mr. 'Twyver bwoke his arm off, an' you put it on aden as dood as new. An' all de fam'ly's talkin' 'bout it, an' 'bout how awful hmart an' nice you are, an' Mr. 'Twyver talks 'bout it more dan all de west of 'em put togevver."

"Nonsense! As I've already said, you mustn't listen to servants' tattle, or repeat it, or believe any of it, else you'll make your Auntie Nell very unhappy, and your mamma and papa too."

"Den I won't do it no more—hones' an' twuly I won't. But how does man's arms look when dey's bwoke off? Is dey djust like doll's arms?"

I explained the difference between a broken arm and a severed one, and the Tiger listened with interest so evident that I, glad of a new topic of conversation, went into details and even pretended to regard the Tiger's own elbow as a fracture and to treat it accordingly, putting it into splints split from a box-cover. I had to repeat the operation on the Insect, and both children were speechless with interest and wonder. Yet when the play was over and I removed the bandages, the Tiger said:

"Mis' Lyle's up-'tairs dirl bet Nowah a box o' tandy dat as hoon as Mr. 'Twyver dot well aden he'd tum up here an' ask you to name de day. An' I asked her if arm-bweaks made folks hoe hick dat dey fordot de names of de days, an' hyee only djust made a funny face."

"I'm glad she was sensible enough to answer in that way," I said, wishing wildly that I could send Norah away and be my own servant. Small wonder that the children some-

times startled me with slang expressions and with annoying questions! But what could I do to prevent?—the custom had begun before my time, and apparently with my sister's approval. I resolved to give Kate a serious lecture on the subject, for I had seen servant-spoiled children even in my own unconventional West.

I would also, for my own sake, speak to Norah—speak firmly, yet kindly, though I wished I might lure her to the roof and cast her down to the pavement without fear of detection. Yet she was one of the best of her class—a modest, neat, pretty girl of about my own age. When I asked her not to bring the children any more stories concerning me from the Lyle's, nor from anywhere else, and declared that there was no ground whatever for the tales already told, and that I should be on my way Westward very soon, she promised volubly and I knew honestly, for her face was one to be trusted. Yet she looked at me admiringly and wonderingly, as if puzzled, and as I turned to leave the room she said, timidly:

"Beggin' your pardon, miss, but 'twill be hard on him—an' him that fine a young man!

An' 'tis his left arm, too—the one that's nearest the heart!"

Norah's illogical sequence, as my college brother would have called it, was beyond my comprehension, yet after the manner of many other well-meant idiocies it worried my wits for half an hour, and might have continued to waste my time had not Mrs. Lyle's "up-'tairs dirl" arrived with a package of bonbons which, it seemed, was to have accompanied the flowers. Quickly calling the children to me, I took them out walking. After some hard and rapid thinking I stopped at a telegraph office, where I got the operator to wire the country hotel where Kate and Harry were, and ask if there was room for a lady and two little children. All that followed need not be described, but in less than twenty-four hours I saw my sister Kate arise from a piazza chair as quickly as if she had seen something of interest, and then I saw two children dash at her and shout:

"Mamma!"

"But what has happened?" Kate asked, after disengaging herself from the children long enough to reduce me to an unsightly object.

"Nothing whatever—at least nothing bad. But I was dying to be with you, and so were the children, and Norah was willing to care for the apartment a few days if she might have one of her little sisters for company. The trip is entirely at my own expense, and for the rest, I hoped you'd forgive me."

"Forgive you," Kate murmured, with all her soul in her eyes. "To have you and my darlings with me again I'd be willing to lose Norah and the house and everything in it. But I wonder what my friends will think when they learn that no one is at home?"

"I thought of that," I replied, "so I dropped a line to Mrs. Lyle, explaining that 'twas plain there was but one way to keep you from returning to your children before Harry's vacation ended. I'm sure your letters read that way. Was I mistaken?"

"No—no!" Kate exclaimed. "Each day here I have declared should be my last, and I'm sure it has made Harry very unhappy."

"You're not to begin tormenting him in another way," I replied. "Unless you let me keep the children out of doors, all day long, in the hills and fields and woods, in our own old

healthy Western fashion, and tumble them into brooks, and teach them to climb trees and track animals, and be little savages in general, I shall take the first train for the West. That is my —what do the politicians call it ?—my ultimatum."

"So long as I can see them morning and night, and know that you will be with them the rest of the time, you may do as you like," said Kate. "And you're a precious savage yourself." So I flattered myself that I had "covered my tracks" most skilfully.

Yet somehow, between sunset and dark, while all the other people at the hotel were clustered at one end of the piazza to get the very last tints of the after-sunset, I told Kate everything, even to my bicycle lessons and what had come of them. And Harry, who heard not a word of it, and with whom Kate had not more than a single minute alone before I met him,—Harry said :

"Nell, you're a goose! You mustn't take it seriously when a young man loses his head over you. I was in that condition, with several girls at a time, before I met Kate, and it did me good, without harming the girls. It put a

lot of nonsense into me, but it took more out. I got some heartaches, but Kate cured the whole lot of them as soon as I met her. Don't give the matter another thought. He will always be grateful to you, and grateful friends, among men, aren't half bad for any woman to have. But before Wayne's arm becomes good again some other girl will have got into his eyes and head—his sister, Mrs. Lyle, knows a lot of them, and very pretty ones too. The next time you see him you've only to treat him as a friend—you needn't even pretend to have any sisterly regard for him."

"Any more, Harry? No? Well, I thank you very much, though I already knew all you've told me, for I'm not a child."

"How crushing! But seriously, Nell, I'm half glad the young scamp broke his arm; 'twill keep him from boating and bicycling a few weeks, and make him ready to give me his entire time when I return to the city and put him into steady, hard training for the work at which our firm intend to use him. Young men—the best as well as the worst, are like colts; what they most hate about work is the breaking-in."

CHAPTER XVI

A Dangerous Dream

To be in the hills and woods once more, and yet be within easy reach of Kate and within arm's-length—seldom more—of my darling nieces, made me feel as if I were at home again and many years younger. I am sure there were days when I felt no older than the Tiger; indeed, she was generally far older than I, if thoughts and questions were indications of age, for I was anew and all the while a-tingle with the delicious riot of living. But the Tiger frequently saw things, and thought gravely of them, and "wanted to know."

And what appetites we had! The children ate as if they wished to burst before leaving the dining-room, yet in all our walks and climbs, and even when we lounged by the hour on sunny rocks or sprawled on the forest's many rugs of pine-needles, they were always hungry, so I learned to carry sandwiches and

biscuits whenever we went out. When they were not hungry they were thirsty, but cool brooks were abundant.

Kate did not know of the insatiable mouths, or she would have been frightened into writing her doctor, but she did see, day by day, that their cheeks grew browner and fuller, and their eyes more lustrous, all of which added to her own happiness and health, until she became almost her old physical self—full of animation, and inclined to old-time rough-and-tumble play with me in her room, while Harry sat by and worshipped her and kept his eyes on her, no matter what she might be doing. I had seen him do something of the kind in his courting days, though not so reverently, so I told Kate of the change, thinking it might please her. But the conceited creature looked at me calmly, grandly—even mysteriously and tantalizingly, as she replied:

"My dear, you'll learn, when your own times comes, that nice men are nicer in every way after they're married. Besides, there's nothing like a load on the shoulders to bring the heart into the eyes."

The mountain air seemed to have filled

Kate with this sort of wisdom, if wisdom it was, for she frequently said such things to me, but generally she got only a sisterly shake or pinch in return. Perhaps it was the mountain air that changed the children's manner also, for though they were frequently more noisy and playful than I had ever seen them at home, there were times when they acted like deaf-mutes that had been stricken with temporary paralysis. For many minutes they would sit or lie motionless while looking into a tree-top, or at the foam-lace fluttering over rocks in a brook, or at some bird as silent as themselves. It was not easy to recall them to their ordinary manner, and unconsciously I stopped trying, for if they had sometimes seemed strange to me while I was caring for them in the city, they now were mysteries, so I often found myself—and lost myself—gazing into their faces and wondering what was going on in their hearts. I had never been very reverent, but now I was abashed and humbled by the conviction that these little creatures were, somehow, far greater and less comprehensible than I, and I began to understand why their mother, who was much wiser than I,

and knew them much better, often looked at them adoringly. Their father did something of the kind, too, but—oh, he wasn't a woman; he was not even a full-grown girl like me.

But there were hours, and many of them, when the children were mere animals—good-natured ones, yet animals to the full in wildness and daring. Some half-grown boys at the hotel did all sorts of dreadful things, which my nieces imitated, to the best of their ability, after having been told that in no circumstances must they play with the boys. They pelted each other with green apples, and chased chickens and "played Injun" with bows and arrows made by their father, the landlord's cows serving for bears and buffaloes, and they pulled hairs from the tail of an unamiable white horse, to make trout-lines, though they had no hooks and they thought the catching of trout an act of cruelty.

In a sawmill near by, the boys would bestride logs through which the saw was making its way, and dare one another to remain till the saw was dangerously near the rider's face; the miller attributed some untimely white hair to the frights which successive summers of city

boys had given him. My nieces viewed the log-riding with unalloyed admiration; they seemed fascinated by it. One day, to keep them from looking on, I told them a long and I thought quite clever story of a little tree which grew and grew till it was so large that it became proud and discontented and wished it might go elsewhere and see other things besides trees and sky and earth. One day it had its wish, for some men chopped it down and lopped off its limbs and tumbled it into a brook, where it rolled and floated and was bruised by rocks, till it reached a mill, where a big saw attacked it, and cut it into boards, which were sent to a city, where they were cut by many other sharp tools, and had nails driven into them, and the poor tree finally found itself part of a floor in a big dark house, where it was walked on by all sorts of people, and never again could see the sky or earth or feel the wind.

"I know 'bout dat tynd o' 'tory," said the Tiger. "It means dat it ain't dood for you to feel 'tuck up, 'tause humfin's doein' to happen to you. I felt dat way one time, when I dot a new wed djess, an' next week what do you 'pose

I dot? I dot de tsicken-pox! But 'tain't much dood to tell people huch 'tories, for I told dat one to de Insec' lots o' times, an each time hyee kwied, 'tause I had de tsicken-pox an' hyee didn't—didn't you, Incie?"

There was no reply, but in an instant the Tiger clutched my arm cruelly, and screamed as if she were being murdered. Turning quickly, I saw the Tiger running toward the mill, through the open sides of which I beheld the Insect astride the log at which the saw was working.

I was only a few steps from the log-carriage, which was moving in the deliberate way of old country saw-mills, but it seemed an hour before I snatched that child and hugged an armful of screams. I was so insane with fear that I ran about a quarter of a mile, followed by the Tiger, before I realized that the Insect was really safe. Then I shook the child soundly, and called her many uncomplimentary names, and asked what she meant by such conduct.

"Why," she sobbed, while the Tiger, large-eyed and white-faced, stood by, "de uvver day I done it, an' de haw tum along,

an' tut me in two, hoe I was two little dirls, djessed djackly alike. An' we played wiv each uvver, an' had lots o' fun. An den, humhow, I was only one little dirl aden. An' to-day I dot lonesome for de uvver little dirl. 'Sides, I wanted Tiggie to hee her, hoe I fought——"

I tumbled to the ground and took her in my arms and promised heaven that she should never again be out of my sight an instant while I had her in my charge. The Tiger, who had lain down beside me and thrown her arm over her sister, whispered to me:

"Hyee djeamed it—don't you hee? I dess it's time to have djeams 'plained to her—awful hard, too, doe I 'pose it'll make dee mamma kwy whole pailfuls."

"I agree with you," I said aloud, "and, that your mother may be spared some unnecessary tears, I shall explain the matter to the Insect at once. Incie, dear, listen to Auntie Nell. You never were two little girls. You merely dreamed that you were."

"But I was two!—weally an' twuly I was. I 'member all 'bout it." The child's eyes looked so honestly into mine that I felt

utterly wretched over the task I was attempting.

"But listen—listen very carefully, dear. I know you thought you were, but it was one of the kind of thoughts that come into people's minds while they're asleep. All men and women have such thoughts sometimes, and they call them dreams."

The Insect looked blank a moment, and then wonderingly, while the Tiger took one little hand in both of her own and looked unutterably sympathetic and miserable. Soon she succeeded in saying:

"Auntie Nell is tellin' you de twoof, Incie dear. Ev'rybody has djeams humtimes, when dey's ahleep, an' djeams is lots o' fun, too—only humtimes dey ain't, when people's ate fings dat disagweed wiv 'em. Don't you 'member all de 'tories you tell us after you takes your naps? Well, dem's all djeams. Papa has 'em, an' mamma has 'em—don't you 'member how papa or mamma humtimes hays, 'I had huch a funny djeam last night?' Well, it means dat while dey was ahleep dey finked dey was doin' humfin' or heein' humfin, but when dey woke up dey

found out it wasn't de twoof. Don't you 'member?"

"Ye—es," drawled the Insect, looking contemplative. "Does you have 'em too?"

"Of tourse I do!—lots of 'em."

"Hooray! I's had anuvver fing dat you's had! Hooray!"—and the Insect became so ecstatic that she danced and capered like a fairy, and the Tiger cried and laughed and joined in the dance, but soon she stopped and said:

"Listen, Incie dear!—listen wiv bofe ears, as papa humtimes hays. Whenever you fink you's done anyfin' or heen anyfin' very 'twange, you must be tareful to ask humbody, 'Was it twue, or did I djeam it?'"

"All wight!" replied the Insect. "But I's had anuvver fing dat you's had,—doe it wasn't de tsicken-pox. Hooray!"

On our way back to the hotel I had some very uncomfortable moments, so I said:

"Children, you must be careful to say nothing to your mother about Incie riding on the log at the sawmill, for 'twould make her very unhappy. I shall tell her about it, but not until we return to the city, where the mill will

be so far away that she won't have any reason to fear it. Meanwhile Auntie Nell will be very unhappy, because she shouldn't have let Incie go into the mill."

"You didn't let me!" exclaimed the Insect, strutting like a pouter pigeon. "I doed all by my own heff, when you wasn't lookin'. I took dood tare o' dat!" The expression of her face while she spoke, was positively impish, or would have been, had any other child worn it.

"But," I said, "you must never run away from me again, or I shall be very wretched,—and I have enough else to make me unhappy. I shall think of how careless I was, and how near my dear little Incie came to being killed, as she would have been had she remained on that log two or three minutes longer."

"I didn't det tilled de uvver time."

"Which other time?" I asked quickly and in terror. Had the child been in the habit of venturing to the mill alone?—and when and how could she have done it?

"Why, de time I was made into two little dirls," the Insect explained. The Tiger, whose eyes had been like corkscrews, approached her sister, and said:

"But dere wasn't any weal uvver time, Incie, dear. Dat was noffin' but a djeam—you must pound it into your fink-box dat it was only a djeam, hoe you tan't make huch mistakes any more."

"O—h—h! I fordot 'bout dat. Well,"—a long sigh followed—"well, tan't I det dat djeam back aden, djust for a minute or two? I want to hee de uvver little dirl aden, 'tause I lent her hum o' my fings, dat I dot in de djeam, an' I want to det 'em back aden, 'tause hyee fordot to div 'em to me. Don't you fink mebbe de djeam 'll tum back aden?"

"'Twill often come to Auntie Nell, I know," said I with a shudder, "I shall see you sitting on that log, with that awful saw rushing at you, and cutting you in two, and——"

"Den when it's tutted me in two you'll ask de uvver little dirl, dat dets made of half o' me, to div me back dem fings o' mine, won't you?"

CHAPTER XVII

A Vacation Prolonged

HARRY'S fortnight of vacation was nearly at its end, and Kate was beginning to talk of returning to the city, but I insisted, with the arrogance and superior wisdom of a younger sister, that she and the children should remain. Her first week had given her entire rest, and her second week was re-making the splendid creature—the finest young woman that her sister's eyes had ever seen—that had married Harry Lintrey a few years before. She could see her children whenever she liked, yet she trusted me so fully that she lost for the time the sense of responsibility which had made her a mere bundle of nerves in her city home. So I demanded, in my own name, and for our parents, whom I insisted were joint owners of the children, that she should remain until she had become permanently strong.

But Kate "set her foot down." She would

not be separated from her husband after having had him all to herself for so many delightful days.

"It has been a second honeymoon," she said, "and a hundred times as nice as the first one. I do believe I've been doing missionary work, for 'tis plain that most of the young women here are believing that some husbands and wives can be lovers long after they have married. They've made me a girl among the girls; they treat me as if I were one of them, and the most interesting one of the lot."

"There's all the more reason why you should remain, and continue the good work," said Harry.

"But—" and Kate's voice grew pathetic as she spoke, "I won't be myself, if you are away from me. Don't you see?"

Harry kissed her; then his forehead wrinkled as he began to walk to and fro, with his hands behind him.

"I see how it is!" Kate sighed. "You are already thinking of business, and I mustn't and shan't prevent you."

"But think of the children, Kate!" I said. "They're growing like weeds, in this glorious

air, and they're happy all the day long. You simply shan't take them back to the heat and lifeless air of the city. Go back with your husband, if you must, but I shall remain here and keep the children with me. I won't allow the dear little things to go back and be wilted. Besides, if you really must go with your husband, you'll be far the better for two or three weeks more of relief from care."

"Leave them?" Kate exclaimed, rising from her chair and calling the children from their play and to her side.

"Nell!" exclaimed Harry, so savagely as to startle me, "I could remain a fortnight longer, if it weren't for you."

"For me?" I wondered, and painfully, what could suddenly have made Harry unbrotherly, for the first time since he had entered our family.

"Yes! All that calls me back is some necessary coaching that I must give Wayne Stryver in the business which our firm expects him to do for them in the West. This is the golden time to do it, for his arm keeps him from wheeling and boating and the other outings that any young man who has not yet

acquired business habits will indulge in whenever he can. So I could give him all my time, and the firm would gladly spare me from the office for that purpose. The provoking thing about it is that I could have him entirely to myself—for he would be away from the chums who drop in to help him kill time, and from his sister and her children, on whom he squanders hours every day, and I could be away from my desk and business interruptions, and could remain here with my wife, if——"

There was a long pause, which Kate broke by asking:

"'If'—what?"

"Oh, if I could call him up here to me, instead of going down to him. In short, if a very dear but very foolish girl did not imagine Stryver in love with her, and that he would annoy her with special attentions."

"You—you lunatic!" I blazed forth. "I don't imagine him in love with me, and I'm quite competent to prevent any annoying attentions, no matter whose they may be. Do you suppose that in our part of the West, where men are twice as numerous as women, any girl can have reached my age without

having had many admirers, and learned their ways? I didn't come up here to avoid Wayne Stryver; 'twas merely that I shouldn't be the subject of kitchen gossip between his home and yours, and that your children should be spared such contaminating twaddle. I never knew before how little girls came by such notions, and a lot of slang besides, for when Kate and I were children our parents were too poor to keep servants. In addition to all that, Mr. Stryver, thanks to some of your children's nonsense, believes that I already have a sweetheart, and as he's a gentleman he'll do nothing worse than admire me, which won't trouble me in the least, for I can endure that sort of thing as gracefully as girls in general. So stop your foolishness—at once!"

"Oh, my ears," Harry moaned. "How they do burn! But, Nell, do you really mean that I may telegraph for him, and stay here two or three weeks longer, so that Kate and the children may not be obliged to go back to the city in the heat of the summer?"

"Yes—on one condition."

"Name it!"

"'Tis that you shall muzzle your dreadful

children, for if they ever again say a word to me about Mr. Stryver, or to him about me, or to any one here about either of us, and I hear of it—as I shall, I'll give you my blessing and take the first train for the West."

Kate, regardless of the several other people who were on the piazza, though not within hearing, had thrown her arms around her husband on learning that her second honeymoon was to be prolonged. But my words about her darlings caused her to take a defiant attitude and to ask :

"What have the dear things said?"

"Oh, what haven't they said?" Fortunately the Tiger and the Insect had returned to their play, and as Harry departed in haste to the telegraph office, I unburdened my heart to Kate and told her of all the malapropos comments the children had inflicted upon the young man and me, and all the annoying questions, too.

"I can't understand it!" said Kate, looking wildly across the country, as if an explanation might be meandering over the hills or entangled in the tree-tops.

"I can," I replied. "'Tis because you and

Mr. Stryver's sister allow your children to be familiar with your servants, who think of nothing but beaus and love-making."

"Poor things!" sighed Kate. "Our servants are the best of their class—good, and neat, and even dainty, but I suppose beaus are their only hope of ever getting homes of their own."

"Probably. But make them keep their beau-talk to themselves; or, keep your children away from them, if you don't wish the little dears to become like the kind you and I detested when we were children together. You know very well that children believe whatever they hear, no matter who may tell it."

Kate went down into the depths, and I steeled my heart so that I should not help her out, for I was concerned far more for my nieces than for myself. Gossip and joking about lovers and love-making had always been sternly discouraged at our house, and I was sure that Kate and I were the better for it, though no girls in our town had met more or better young men than we.

After the children had been put to bed,

Kate told me that they wished to see me, and when I entered their room, the Tiger said :

" We ain't ever doein' to talk to you any more 'bout Mr. 'Twyver, 'tause mamma hays it ain't nice."

" But we is nice," added the Insect, from behind and around the fingers in her mouth.

" Ain't you dlad, doe," the Tiger asked, " dat Mr. 'Twyver's tummin' up here? 'Tause papa's dot to talk to him 'bout a lot of business, an' it lets papa 'tay here wiv mamma an' us."

" I djust love Mr. 'Twyver for doin' it," said the Insect. " Don't you love him for doin' it too, Auntie Nell?"

" No, dear, though I'm very glad for papa's and mamma's sake that he's coming."

" Well, I don't fink it's very dood of you not to love Mr. 'Twyver for doin' it."

The Tiger whispered to her sister, who clapped her hands to her mouth and looked troubled :

" Aunty Nell," said the Tiger, " don't you 'member how funny Mr. 'Twyver looked at you dat day on de Dwive, when your wheel wan away wiv you?"

"No, I don't! Nor do I believe that you remember any thing of the kind."

"But I do."

"Hoe do I!" said the Insect. A strange expression came into her eyes as she added, "But I dess I must have djeamed it—an' Tiggie djeamed it too! Hooray! We bofe djeamed de hame fing!"

The Tiger looked doubtful, and she drawled:

"I—don't—know—'bout dat. I fink my eyes was awful wide open dat time, hoe I don't like to b'lieve I djeamed it."

"Den you's a hateful fing!" whined the Insect, emphasizing her opinion with a slap and receiving in return a pinch that made the Insect cry.

"Children!—children!" Then the Tiger wept and told the Insect that she was sorry, and the Insect replied:

"I ain't horry a bit! Dat's de first djeam—de very first, dat we was ever in togevver, an' you don't want to be in it!"

"Do be in it, Tiggie," I begged, "if only to please your dear little sister."

"Well, I'll twy to. But 'twill take an awful lot o' twyin'."

"Hay, Auntie Nell," the Insect asked, "is you doein' to mend Mr. 'Twyver's arm aden?"

"No, child. The doctor gave it the second mending."

"Dat's funny. 'Tause Nowah hed—" The strange look came into her eyes again as she added, "I'll bet dat I djeamed dat too!"

"Auntie Nell," said the Tiger, "Nowah hed dat de bwoke was in Mr. 'Twyver's left arm an' dat arm was nearest de heart, an' dat was a hine. What's it a hine of?"

"'Tis a sign that Norah is a goose. Sensible people don't believe in signs."

"Yes dey do. Papa does, an' you needn't tell me dat he ain't hensible, else I'll b'lieve you djeamed it. He hays dat when we have two helpin's of pweserves at hupper it's a hine dat we'll wake up twoss in de mornin'. An' it always tums twue. When Mr. 'Twyver——"

"Tiggie, you called me in here a few moments ago to tell me that never again would you speak to me about Mr. Stryver. Yet you've talked of him and nothing else! What do you mean by it?"

The Tiger looked unhappy, and she searched her mind a long time before she replied:

"I didn't mean to—hones' an' twuly I didn't. I'll tell you how I dess it was. Mamma talked to us huch a lot about him, djust before you tame in, dat I tan't fink 'bout anyfing else."

"My fink-box is cwam full of him," the Insect complained, "an' mamma made it dat way. I wiss hyee'd tum back an' take him out of it."

Suddenly the Tiger arose, rested an elbow on the pillow, looked at me with the air of one who had made a great discovery, and said:

"I's dot it! Incie, dear, listen—weal hard! Ev'ry time we fink 'bout Mr. 'Twyver, let's make b'lieve it's a djeam! Let's make b'lieve dat he's a djeam, too! An', Auntie Nell, you tan help us, 'tause you tan make b'lieve, djust like us, dat he ain't noffin' but a djeam."

"An awful—bid—djeam!" murmured the Insect, as she drifted into dreamland and I slipped from the room.

CHAPTER XVIII

"Playin' Injun"

When Mr. Stryver came up from the city he looked so little like an invalid that Kate, whose heart went out to every afflicted creature, declared that she had utterly wasted a great lot of sympathy on him. Though he carried his left arm in a sling, his complexion was good and his eyes clear, and he held his own with Harry on an outing for trout before he had been with us forty-eight hours.

Better still, he made light of his infirmity, and declined assistance of every kind, except from Harry, with whom he spent most of his time. As our hotel was not fashionable, he lived all day in what the young women from New York called bicycle clothes, golf clothes, tennis clothes or boating clothes—each according to her associations. Whatever they were, they seemed to compel him to conform his manners to them, for, though never rude or careless, he was entirely unconventional and

at his ease, and therefore very unlike his city and formal self.

After the evening meal he would sit for hours with us and chat about ordinary affairs as naturally as if he were not a superior being —in his own estimation—and he and Harry would exchange improbable stories as merrily as if they were competing for the long-bow championship. Often a business reminder would obtrude itself; it seemed that Mr. Stryver had taken a long special course in metallurgy and mining, that he might become a mining engineer, as Harry was; so at times I heard of shafts and tunnels and winzes and levels and veins and fissures and blankets and chlorides and sulphurets and refractories and concentrates and free milling and amalgamating and cyaniding, until it seemed that my father and brother were talking.

It was impossible that Kate and I should not take part in these conversations, for were we not daughters of a mining expert? Our comments seemed at first to astonish our guest, and then to amuse him, but as he never forgot his manners he soon acquired the habit of asking our opinion of everything of which

he and Harry talked. He did it quite nicely, too, telling us frequently that though he had studied hard for years, the most he had learned of mining was that an ounce of experience was worth a ton of theory.

For the rest, he was quite as polite and attentive to the other girls at the hotel as to me, and as these girls had no sisters' children on their hands, or anything else to do, they made much of him, which I didn't doubt he enjoyed, for he was not a fool and he was a young man. I had always liked to see my only full-grown brother among a lot of nice girls, for between them they taught him that there was more than one girl in the world, which, according to my father, who knows everything, is the most important bit of knowledge a young man can acquire before he meets the "onlyest" girl in the world—the adjective is father's own.

The children—bless their hearts!—made not a bit of the trouble I had feared. We were out and away every morning with a full lunch basket, and we remained in the woods, though never very far from the hotel, until mid-afternoon or later. We were entirely safe, for tramps had never been seen in the vicinity.

At first Kate was horrified at my letting the Insect take her afternoon nap on a bed of dry leaves that had been warmed by the sun, but when I assured her that I always sat by her side, reading a book, or whispering stories to the Tiger, she withdrew her objections, being assisted by Harry's assertion that he wished the children and their mother and he could sleep out of doors three hundred and sixty-five days (or nights) of every year. I did not tell Kate that sometimes I too fell asleep beside the Insect for a few moments, with my big farmer-hat over my eyes, and that on waking from such naps I always found the Tiger on guard over both of us.

My only cause of fear was snakes—a class of beings which from my youth up I had been taught to suspect and avoid. Before we had been in the mountains a week the Tiger came to me, laughing as if she and the Insect had devised a new and utterly silly joke, and she said:

"De funniest fing! Dere was a old piece of wope lyin' hide o' de woad, an' I was doein' to pick it up an' make a djumpin'-wope of it, an'—what do you fink? Why, all-a-hudden it

" Dere was a old piece of wope lyin' hide o' de woad."

dot a head on one end of it, an' made faces at me! An' den it hlipped away as if humbody was pullin' it."

"Tiggie!" I gasped, "that wasn't — you mustn't ever—Tiggie, that wasn't a piece of rope. It was something very dangerous. It was a serpent—a snake!"

The Tiger's eyes became so large that I feared serious consequences; but the child should be thoroughly warned, if she did not already know of serpents and their ways, so I continued:

"Have you never heard of snakes, and the —ugh—dreadful things they do?"

"Yes," the Tiger replied, contemptuously. "Papa's told me all 'bout de hnake in de front o' de Bible—de one dat talked, an' told a lot o' lies, an' coaxed Mrs. Adam to eat hum apples. Dere's a pittcher of him in our big Bible. But de one in de woad didn't look a bit like him. An' it didn't hay nuffin' 'bout apples—but dey ain't wipe yet. But mebbe he was twyin' to talk, 'tause he wiggled his head weal hard, an' 'tuck out his tongue. It's dood for him dat he didn't tell me any of his lies, 'tause——"

"Tiggie, do be quiet and listen to me. Whenever you see anything in the road, or the grass, or the bushes, that looks like a bit of rope, turn at once and go the way you came, so that you shan't be hurt. Snakes bite people; sometimes they kill them. Do you hear me?"

"Of tourse I do. You needn't 'plit your fwoat 'bout it. Well, well! To fink dat it was a hnake, an' not a wope at all! Hay, Auntie Nell, what did de Lord make hnakes for? What's dey dood for, anyhow?"

"Good for? They are good to teach little girls to keep their eyes open, and not to meddle with anything they don't understand, even if it looks like a dirty piece of—ugh!—rope."

"Well, dere wasn't any little dirls in de darden where dat ol' hnake in de Bible made hoe much twouble, hoe——"

"No, but girls, and women, have been afraid of them ever since."

"Boys ain't afwaid of 'em, doe. 'Tause I heard hum of de boys at de hotel talkin' 'bout how dey wanted to till a lot of 'em. Dem boys knows lots of funny fings, an' hum day me an' de Insec' is doein' to——" The statement

was stopped by a fit of laughter, but the Tiger recovered and asked:

"Hay, Auntie Nell, what's a pwincess?"

"The daughter of a king, dear. But what has put princesses into your blessed, ridiculous little head?"

"Oh, noffin'," was the reply, accompanied by an embarrassed look.

"Don't say 'noffin'' in that foolish way, but tell me."

"Must I?—hones' an' twuly?"

"Yes—and at once."

"Well, I's dlad of it, 'tause I want to know 'bout it. De uvver day, when you was tummin' atwoss de dwass in fwont o' de hotel, Mr. 'Twyver hed dat you looked like an Injun pwincess, wiv your bwown face an' 'perb eyes an' bwoad hyoulders an' tweenly walk an'—oh, humfin' else—I fordet what."

"Never mind it, dear. I don't doubt 'twas 'humfin'' equally foolish."

"Well, mamma didn't fink 'twas foolish, 'tause hyee looked djust like hyee does when papa tells her humfin' weal nice. An' papa was dere too, an' he hed, 'You heem to have your eyes in your head, ol' man.' An' wasn't

dat funny o' papa? 'Tause where else tood Mr. 'Twyver teep his eyes?"

I ignored the subject by going in search of the Insect and beginning our daily ramble in the woods, with the occasional burrowings in the earth and scrutiny of animals, insects, and birds, of which the children never wearied. I told them of many strange things in plant-life and animal habits, and they were insatiate for more. Yet after a morning stroll and climb and a midday meal, they were quite as willing as I to sprawl on a warm hillside only half shaded by the trees, and quietly enjoy the fresh air and the ever-new delight of mere living.

The air seemed warmer and the day balmier than usual, so while the Insect slowly fell asleep, her cherubic head pillowed upon my arm, I fell to day-dreaming and then dropped into a doze. I was soon roused by little fingers passing softly over my cheeks and brow, and when I opened my eyes I saw the Tiger looking so happy that I asked her what was amusing her.

"Oh, I was djust finkin' 'bout hum fun de Insec' an' me'll have when we det back to de hotel."

I gently displaced the Insect's head from my arm, arose, and began to contemplate the scenery. I heard the Insect stir, but the Tiger was beside her in a moment, and there was the customary interchange of kisses and whisperings and catch-words and titters, and by the time we started homeward the children were capering as gayly as if they had not been on their feet most of the day.

"Children," I said, "wouldn't it be lovely if we could take the woods and hills and brooks and air back to New York with us when we go?"

"'Deed it would," the Tiger replied, "but we toodn't play Injun dere wivout havin' lots o' little 'treet wowdies after us an' bovverin' us."

"Ah? You're playing Indian, are you? I couldn't imagine why you were acting so wildly."

"Yes, we's Injuns, but we don't make b'lieve murder people, an' take de hair off of deir heads an' put it in our belts, like de boys do. An' you's our pwincess."

"De Injun pwincess," added the Insect. "We don't like bid med'cine mans, an' Hittin' Bulls, an' fings, like de boys has to boss 'em.

But Injun pwincesses is nice." Then they danced about me, and uttered many yells, learned from the boys and supposed to be war-whoops, and they demanded that I should lead them on a buffalo-hunt. The bushes would do for buffaloes, if we "made b'lieve" hard enough, and for weapons the long straight sticks, which I cut every morning, partly as walking-sticks, partly to "poke" with, would serve as spears. Blessed be imagination! Those two children "made b'lieve" so industriously that they invested the bushes with horns and manes and tails, and threw the spears as carefully as if their dinners depended on the result.

There is something infectious in imagination and excitement when they are prolonged, even by children, for I soon found myself pretending to be an Indian. I tossed my hat back till it lay on my shoulders, and I threw spears as earnestly as the children, and was as pleased, when I hit the mark, as I had ever been when shooting with a rifle at real game in real mountains.

Buffaloes became scarce as we roamed over a bit of ground on which there had been forest

fire, so we Indians pressed down the slope toward a brook which was fringed with low growth. Near the brook I stopped, pointed to a dense clump, and exclaimed:

"Look at it!—the big buffalo!—the leader of the herd!" I poised my spear carefully, threw it with all my might and made a fair hit. The children yelled gleefully, and a voice not at all childish said:

"Good shot!" Then Mr. Stryver and a trout-rod came from behind the thicket.

"I hope you were not hit!" I said. "The children have been playing Indian and killing buffaloes, and I had to join in the sport, for they appointed me an Indian—er—leader."

"An Injun pwincess," the Tiger explained.

"Capital! You act the part splendidly, and look it too."

"Thank you. What luck have you had with your rod?"

The children found the answer in his basket, and began to play that the trout were dead dolls, while I begged the angler not to let us interfere with his sport.

"I'm glad of an excuse to rest," he replied. "A little fishing is enough, when a man has

but one free hand." Then he smiled at the children's new play, and talked in a low tone of the oddity of children in general and of their ability to imagine the impossible. He told of some diversions of his own nieces that were so peculiar that he could not have believed them possible had he not seen them, and heard the children's talk while they played. Each of his stories elicited something similar about my own nieces, so we exchanged tales till I thought it time to take my charges back to their mother. Mr. Stryver seemed somewhat embarrassed when I started, and he stammered:

"Shan't you—er—didn't you intend to remove your—er—the insignia of your suppositious Indian leadership before returning to the hotel?"

I stared at him a moment before I replied:

"Insignia? I don't understand you."

He looked at me wonderingly, and then he looked helpless. Seeming to suspect something he turned and said:

"Children!"

They dropped their trout-dolls and hurried toward him. He looked at them reprovingly and asked:

"Is your aunt's new—though very effective—face a part of your Indian play?"

"Injun pwincess!—Injun pwincess!" they shouted, and again they began dancing and shouting their war-whoop. I felt indignant, for I hate mystery, and it was plain that the children were laughing at me. Mr. Stryver said gently:

"Please forgive them! Children will be children, as we both admitted a moment ago. Your nieces have merely traced two or three red lines on your face, apparently with a crushed berry. Allow me to remove them."

Quickly wetting a handkerchief in the brook he passed it softly over my cheeks and forehead, telling me at the same time of the painting which some of the boys longest at the hotel had inflicted upon a new arrival who wished to play Indian with them. Mr. Stryver meant well, and no woman could have treated my face more daintily, but my cheeks burned so hotly, as I thought of the spectacle I might have offered at the hotel had he not met us, that it seemed as if they must dry the water as soon as it touched them.

"You're very kind," I said, "but please let

me take the handkerchief? I'm afraid my face needs ruder treatment than you're giving it."

I had been in the woods often enough, out home, to know the value of still water as a mirror, so I stepped toward an unrippled part of the brook, turned toward the sun, and looked at the reflection of my face. Horrors! I saw broad red streaks and spots on each cheek and on my forehead too. Oh, those impish children! I washed and rubbed and scrubbed, but berry stain — I knew what it had often done to my finger-tips, though in such cases the effect was general, not streaky. Fortunately my complexion, heightened by friction and anger, soon made my face appear rid of its paint, so I called sharply:

"Children! I shall take you to your mother—at once!"

"Please don't be too severe with them!" Mr. Stryver begged, as he took the wet handkerchief from my hand and walked beside me. "Of course they don't for an instant realize what a liberty they have taken."

"Not after having seen me look like a savage?—a squaw?—or worse—a guy?"

"Pardon me, but you looked like nothing of the sort. I'm sure I ought to know. Any artist would have had the inspiration of his life could he have seen you—er—spear that buffalo. Diana at the chase could not have——"

"Diana in war-paint?"

"I assure you that I didn't see the paint—till afterward. I saw only your eyes and pose. I've an artist friend—quite a prominent portrait painter, who insists that what he calls the 'hunter's eye' is one of the rarest and noblest graces of woman's face."

"Indeed? I hope I may find it, when I can spare the time to look for it. But at present I should most like to know when and how those dreadful children disfigured me."

"Allow me to find out for you. Children!"

"Huh?" responded the Tiger. I had given both of my nieces so many indignant glances, after discovering their trick, that they had remained a step or two behind us and conversed only in whispers.

"Which do you like best—marshmallows, or cream chocolates?"

"Bofe," the Insect replied, with ladylike yet lingering modulation of voice.

"Good! You shall have both, when we return to the hotel, if you will tell Miss Trewsome how and when and why you marked her face so peculiarly."

"Why, you hee," said the Tiger, "we haw de boys at de hotel play Injun lots o' times, an' we wanted to play it wiv 'em, but Auntie Nell wouldn't let us, an' papa an' mamma wouldn't neiver. An' humtimes de boys made deir faces all Injun wiv berries an' fings, but mamma an' papa an' Auntie Nell hed we mustn't do it. An' de uvver day mamma hed Auntie Nell had been out in de wind an' hun hoe much dat hyee looked like an Injun tween —dere was one of 'em here dat day, hellin' baskets an' fings."

"Complimentary!" I murmured.

"Libellous!" Mr. Stryver asserted.

"An' den Mr. 'Twyver hed you looked like an Injun pwincess, an'—"

"Er—what I wish to learn," Mr. Stryver said hastily, "is not what people said, no matter how honestly, but how Miss Trewsome was painted to-day."

"Well," the Tiger continued, "we fought how much more Injun-tweeny an' Injun-pwincessy hyee'd look if hyee had de marks on her face like de boy-Injuns. An' my fink-box dot djust full of it. An' to-day, when hyee dwopped ahleep on de leaves wiv de Insect, I djust toodn't 'tand it any longer. Hoe I dot hum bewwies, an mashed 'em in my hand, djust like de boys does, an' wubbed my finger in 'em, and putted it atwoss her face a lot o' times, weal hoft, 'tause I took her big hat off her eyes, hoe de hun looked into 'em, an' hyee might wake up 'fore I dot fwoo. An' bimeby hyee woke up, an' pooty hoon de Insec' woke up, an' I told her 'bout it, hoe Auntie Nell toodn't hear me."

"An' bofe of us most busted ourseffs laughin'," added the Insect, "Auntie Nell played Injun a million times splendider dan de boys at de hotel. An' we never had huch lots o' fun in our lives."

"Think of it!" Mr. Stryver whispered. "What wouldn't some people give to have made two little innocents so happy."

"Are the little innocents—imps!—the only ones to be considered?"

"Er—I really supposed they were—in your family."

"Not to the extent of humiliating any one else."

"Really? I'd imagined, from an experience of my own—it was the second time I had the honor of meeting you, that——"

I recalled the night when he was ushered into the parlor while the children and I were rolling on the floor, and how I avenged myself by insisting that he should swing the children, and sing doggerel to them, and compromise his dignity, so I replied quickly:

"'Twas my fault—entirely, and I beg that you'll forgive me."

"'Twill be very difficult!" he sighed,—and then he smiled mischievously, "but I will make the effort if you will kindly tell me what a 'tolledge datepost' is. 'Tis an expression which my nieces acquired from your nieces, and I've been quite curious to——"

"'Tis nothing—there is no such thing. There was, but it has entirely disappeared, like some of the extinct species."

"Thank you!" he said, with an affectation of relief, and also with a look that made me

laugh so heartily that I forgot the "Injun" incident till we were near the hotel grounds, and Mr. Stryver said:

"As there's no brook here to serve as mirror, allow me to adjust your hat for you. There are still traces of those berry stains, and your hat may hide them."

Dropping his rod he carefully moved my hat sideways, forward and backward, studying the effect each time as if worlds were hanging on the result. He looked, also, as if he honestly wondered which of the marks most needed hiding. Suddenly he chanced to look so deep into my eyes, which had not received any of the paint, that the brilliant thought came to me that I had two hands of my own, and that I could—and must—draw the hat down till it should shade my entire face.

CHAPTER XIX

Utterly Unexpected

THE merciless scolding which I had intended to give the children, in the presence of their parents, dwindled into a pitiful appeal to Kate; wouldn't she instruct her darlings to refrain from taking any liberties with my face and general appearance?

I told her and Harry of my war paint and of our playing "Injun" and buffalo hunting, and Kate exclaimed "Shocking!" and Harry roared "Splendid!" and said he shouldn't be happy till he had heard Stryver's version of the story. So day after day passed, with occasional discomforting imaginings for me, and many avoidances of Mr. Stryver. But early one morning, at the end of the week, Kate took me into her room, locking the door as if she had something of importance to communicate, and said:

"Nell, Harry has done his utmost to get

Mr. Stryver's own story of the buffalo hunt at which he surprised you, in all your glory of paint and spear, but not a word can he get—not even an admission that Mr. Stryver saw anything of the kind."

"Indeed? So you don't believe the story which I told you, and which the children confessed was entirely true?"

"Oh, Nell! Don't jump at conclusions, if you don't wish to land on the wrong spot—how often have you heard that from father? I wasn't thinking of the story, but of Mr. Stryver. Harry says he has heard business men's talks that were marvels of evasion, but he never met Mr. Stryver's equal at getting away from a subject—one subject."

"'Tis very kind of Mr. Stryver," I replied, with a great sense of relief, for where is the girl who likes to be laughed at by a young man?

"Kind?" Kate echoed. "'Tis more than kind. It shows that Wayne Stryver is at heart what most young men are on the surface only—a gentleman. Can't you understand the difference?"

"Yes, but don't speak so loud. Any girl

can understand it after she has met a lot of machine-made gentlemen—young men whose manners are only on the surface, as you express it."

Kate kissed me effusively as she murmured:

"I'm so glad you know it, for—for you were my first baby, you know. I'm never sure which way I feel most strongly toward you—sisterly, or motherly."

I thanked her and caressed her, but all the while I felt that I must fly, or scream, or do something ridiculous, so I shouted for the children and hurried them to the woods and on a wild tramp, carrying the Insect whenever her short legs wearied of my gait. Kate offered to accompany us, for Harry had been called to the city for a single day, and she said she not only feared she would be lonesome, but that she felt physically equal to anything. But for some reason I did not want her; I wanted to run wild, and shout, which might have astonished Kate, though the children would take it as a matter of course.

We had a glorious time and a rapid one, that made us ravenous for our noonday dinner. For dessert we had some berries from a clump

of bushes in the sun near a brook, where we unexpectedly met Mr. Stryver, who explained that he had been obliged to go out with his rod, as Harry was away. I offered him a seat on a fallen tree-trunk, apologized for our emptied lunch-basket, but asked the children to pick him some berries. He called my attention to a flowering shrub near by, and took me over to it and discoursed botanically about it, meanwhile breaking a twig covered with bloom and shyly thrusting it between the buttons of my blouse.

His lecture was interrupted by a wild scream from the Tiger, whom we saw stumbling backward, waving a bleeding hand, while she exclaimed:

"Hnake!"

The young man leaped toward her, stooped, struck the ground vigorously with his foot several times and placed his toe under something which, a second after, looked like a piece of rope as it was kicked through the air and many feet away. A snake had bitten the Tiger! I felt myself tottering; then reminding myself that it was not the time to become useless I hurried to the child, but Mr. Stryver

was already on his knees beside her and sucking the wound.

"'Tis the best treatment," he said in a moment, as I stood helpless beside him, and saw, for a second only, two dark red punctures on the fleshy part of the child's thumb.

"There's a doctor at the hotel—I'll run for him," I said.

"Don't," he replied. "Please take from my side-pocket a flask of brandy—remove the top—excuse me—" and his face contorted as his lips worked vigorously at the wound. After a few seconds he stopped long enough to say:

"Make her swallow some of it—tell her she must."

I obeyed; the Tiger coughed and spluttered and tears came into her eyes as I gazed into her face and recalled all I had ever known and heard of snake-bites in our part of the West, where they were not uncommon. The treatment was the same as Mr. Stryver's; the wounds were sucked and spirits were given, and I could not recall a case that had been fatal, but the sufferers had been rude men, who could recover from almost anything, while the

Mr. Stryver was already on his knees beside her and sucking the wound.

Tiger was a tender child—and my darling niece. If the worst should come, would Kate ever forgive me?

But the Tiger—bless her ignorance!—soon began to regard the affair as somewhat humorous. Instead of turning purple, as was the rule in cases of snake-bite, her face remained rosy and her eyes bright, and she smiled through her tears. The brandy may have contributed to this result, but my heart had many alternations of stopping and painful throbbing. Soon Mr. Stryver, who all the while had been looking into her face, mumbled fragmentarily from the side of his mouth, without stopping his work more than a second at a time:

"She's safe—I'm sure of it. It must have happened—five minutes ago. There would be—some purple tinge—if the—snake poison were not—fairly—removed."

"Huh!" said the Tiger. "How tood hnake-poison det on bwiars, I'd like to know?"

"Tiggie!" I gasped. "Didn't the snake bite you?"

"N—o—o—o! But he fwightened me mos' to deff. An' de bwiars hurt me awful,

'tause I pulled against 'em, hoe's to det away fwom de hnake when I heen him."

I made a noise of which I had never been guilty before, and lost heart and breath and sight, and tumbled backward, my last thought being that my head might strike the fallen tree near which I had been standing.

I had always despised girls who fainted, so when I began to recover my senses, I drawled:

"I wish—my—head—hadn't—struck—that—log."

"But it didn't," said Mr. Stryver.

Certainly my head was resting on something very hard and unyielding. Opening my eyes and in other ways coming to myself I discovered that Mr. Stryver's right arm was around me—and his left arm too.

"Your broken arm!" I exclaimed. "Do take care of it."

"I'm doing so," he replied, with a look that compelled me to close my eyes quickly. "It is better than ever, thanks to your heart beating against it."

I tried to rise, but I did not succeed. The Tiger, and the dreadful snake, came to my mind, so I said:

"Tiggie? Are you safe, dear? Do you feel entirely well? Are you very, very sure you were not bitten?"

"She is entirely safe," said Mr. Stryver tenderly, "and she looks as natural as ever, so don't worry about her."

"I'm not worrying," I replied, as I burst into tears.

"Then why should you weep? Do let me dry your eyes—and there's but one way practicable—in the circumstances." Whereupon he began to kiss my tears away, and I was helpless—until he had mistaken my lips for eyes two or three times. Then I regained self-possession and said:

"Some things may be more thoroughly done with a handkerchief, and I have one somewhere."

"So have I," he replied, tossing his armsling from his neck and slowly extracting from his breast-pocket a stained something which recalled my "war-paint" experience of a week before.

"There is a laundry at the hotel," I ventured, as he gently dried my eyes.

"Yes—but that handkerchief shall never be

washed, unless there is a laundry in heaven. Even there I shall prefer it as it is—stains and all."

"The beautiful flowers you gave me!" I exclaimed, as he helped me to my feet, and I looked myself over. "They're crushed—killed."

"Not they!" said he, taking them from my breast and thrusting them into his own. "They'll live forever —I'll stake my life on it."

We walked back to the hotel as quietly—the children, Mr. Stryver, and I—as if we were tired of one another, yet wherever a rock or log was in the path I was helped over it as tenderly as if I were an invalid, and I did not decline the assistance. We had almost reached the door, when the Insect, who had been as quiet as a mouse in all the excitement, asked:

"Auntie Nell, was it all a djeam?"

"All what, dear?"

"Why—Mr. 'Twyver tissin' you, an' ev'ryfin'."

"Yes—yes, dear." And Mr. Stryver added: "A dream that shall have no end."

"But, Incie," I said quickly, "if you ever

breathe a word of it to any one I'll—I'll—I'll—"

"And," said Mr. Stryver, "besides all the dreadful things that your Auntie Nell will do to you, I'll never, never, never give you a marshmallow or a cream chocolate, though I have hundreds of them at the hotel."

"Dat's too bad," sighed the Tiger, "'tause de Insec's awful leaky."

As for me, I vowed to myself that wild horses shouldn't ever drag the afternoon's story from me, for Kate would be frantic and wish to return to the city at once were she to know that one of her children might have been bitten by a snake. So I composed my face and my spirits, and met Kate as bravely as if nothing unusual had occurred. Together we put the children to bed and heard them say their prayers; then Kate put her arm around me, drew me from the room and into her own, which was dark, and whispered:

"Tell me all about it."

"About what? Has the Insect leaked?"

"No, but you've leaked, and you're my darling and only sister."

"Oh, the Tiger was picking berries, and——"

"Never mind the Tiger—bless her heart! Go on with the story!"

"But the Tiger——" I told all, and Kate shuddered and cried and laughed and sistered me and mothered me, and when I had finished and rested my head on her shoulder, she said:

"I'm so glad 'tis settled."

"But," I protested, "nothing is settled. 'Twas all an accident, and Wayne—why, father and mother don't know him——"

"But they know all about him."

"How?—through whom?"

"Through Harry. Mr. Stryver told us, in a manly way that captured us, that you were the only girl he had ever met, whom he would like to win, and as he is twenty-five years old and has seen much of society, he ought to know his own mind. We warned him to go slowly and carefully, telling him that you were not the sentimental kind, but we assured him that you had not already a sweetheart, as he had supposed. Then he asked Harry to inform father and mother of his hopes, and to say whatever good of him we could. Harry knows all about him and his family, and could say nothing but what was good."

"But I shall go home soon, and he will be two thousand miles away."

"Oh, no, he won't, unless you make him remain here. Harry's firm has a place for him in a mine in our State, and not far from our old home, and he is sure of a better start in life than dear Harry had when we married."

"But 'tis all so new—and strange—and unexpected."

"'Tis always so, dear, to her who deserves it. But we foresaw it from the first—Harry and I. So did Wayne's sister, Mrs. Lyle, not that there were any signs, but because it seemed that it ought to be. I don't for a moment doubt that heaven foresaw it too, and made Wayne fall from his wheel and break his arm."

I could not reply. While my wits were in a daze I heard the patter of little feet, and saw two small figures in white, and one of them said:

"'Tain't no use, Auntie Nell. De Insec's dot to leak, or hyec'll bust."

"Auntie Nell," the Insect asked, "it wasn't a djeam, was it?—weally an' twuly?"

I took her in my arms and whispered:

"No, dear."

So——